fortune favours

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/47528002.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe, Sea God!Will, Shapeshifter!Will, Siren!Will, MerMay, Courting a God, Canon-Typical Violence, Cannibalism, human sacrifices, Love at First Sight, Hannibal is smitten, Poetry and art, Explicit Sexual Content, Monsterfucking, Blood and Rough Sex, Morally Grey Will
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of abyssal zone, aka the mermay works
Collections:	Deep Ocean Lo-Fi Beats to Read Fic To
Stats:	Published: 2023-05-30 Words: 25,116 Chapters: 1/1

fortune favours

by tciddaemina

Summary

It's chance that has Hannibal walking along the path at that particular hour. Sunset has bruised the sky, giving way to a soft twilight as the last of the light fades, the shadows of the forest growing deeper, the quiet noises of the night taking over. The woods are thick, overgrown, the path he's walking little more than an old imprint of tires, thick now with grass.

The road to the property trails along the side of the water water, long and winding, the dark lapping of the waves visible in glimpses through the trees as Hannibal walks, and it is chance, only chance, that Hannibal is passing by at the right moment to glance out at the old broken jetty in time to see someone sitting at its end. The first glance makes him pause, a low thread of interest running through him.

-

Hannibal has a chance encounter. It changes his life.

Notes

For the Abyssal_Zone mermay 2023 collection, being run out of CherShares discord server.

Prompt: *And there are those for whom we weep.* Hunger. Abyss. Leviathan. Isolation. Affection. Unnatural. Glow. Pride.

See the end of the work for more notes

It's chance that has Hannibal walking along the path at that particular hour. Sunset has bruised the sky, giving way to a soft twilight as the last of the light fades, the shadows of the forest growing deeper, the quiet noises of the night taking over. The woods are thick, overgrown, the path he's walking little more than an old imprint of tires, thick now with grass.

It is a rare night that he's out alone like this, in the wilderness, shedding the comfort and civilities of Baltimore in favour of the shadow of the trees and the cool night air, the perfume of a world scented with decay and green living notes - wet earth and rotting wood, the salt from the shore and the faint musk of some small animal that has since disappeared into the trees.

Typically, Hannibal is a creature of comforts, rarely feeling the need to distance himself so completely from humanity. But there is a joy, he supposes, in stepping out into the quiet of nature, returning to a more primordial kind of silence, walking unmasked and unhindered, out of sight of watching eyes. The pass time can be a pleasing one, a small reprieve from the bustle of his practice and the endless gentle manoeuvring of his social obligations. There is a serenity to be found in singularity, to be a creature walking alone, out here in the cool night air, the weight of his personhood falling for a moment from his shoulders.

That his long walks through the woods also allows him to scope out places to dispose of some remains is helpful as well. Not every body is one he wants found, and for every hunt that Hannibal displays another five vanish quietly into the woodwork, disappearing gently, leaving this world not with a bang but with a whimper. It's a property that's brought him out here into the woods, technically, a run down old house and barn set well off the road. The house itself is not much, of course, an old wreck that's sat empty too long, but the land around it...

The nearest neighbouring property nearly a mile and a half away, the property itself well set back of the road, the forest crowding up to meet the sea, the reaching fingers of the Chesapeake Bay raking in through the coast to create quiet corners where land and water meet. An isolated placed, forgotten and well endowed in forest - purchased through a series of false names, it would make a useful place to dig a few deep graves.

The light had begun to fade as Hannibal had inspected the property, but he'd made no move to hurry back, finishing his thorough circuit. He hasn't contacted the sellers yet, preferring to take the chance to make his visit without leaving a trace, but perhaps in a few days the realtor will receive a curt email, offering thirty percent more than the asking price in exchange for a quick sale.

The road to the property trails along the side of the water water, long and winding, the dark lapping of the waves visible in glimpses through the trees as Hannibal walks, and it is chance, only chance, that Hannibal is passing by at the right moment to glance out at the old broken jetty in time to see someone sitting at its end. The first glance makes him pause, a low thread of interest running through him as his eyes narrow.

It's late now, past sundown, the world only growing darker. Late enough to make the presence of another person a surprise. Hannibal hadn't expected to see another person here, not in so isolated a place, in a property that has been abandoned for so long. For there to be a person passing near, visiting it's jetty... Perhaps Hannibal ought to reevaluate the property's usefulness.

The thought turns in his head, developing as Hannibal continues along the path, the trees finally falling away as the path to the jetty splits off. It's there that he gets his first proper look at the man, the sight enough to make his feet slowly still beneath him.

The man's figure had been too obscured for Hannibal to notice at that first glance, but as he pauses now, looking at him properly, it strikes him that the man is bare. A pale man, Caucasian, sitting right at the end of the jetty, the lines of his back naked to the open air, exposed down to the waist, where some sort of black garment rises to hug his hips, legs dangling over the edge of the water.

It's enough to make Hannibal pause, intrigued now. Something about the image is captivating - the strong lines of that back, those shoulders, the black of the man's hair, the way the last of the dim fading light plays across the water, the world turned shadowed and dark, the man a spectre sitting at the edge of the voice, his purpose inscrutable as he stares out over the water. The scene tugs at Hannibal with the same soft awe as he might feel staring at a painting in a gallery - the interplay of shadow and fading light, the water beyond and the pale figure at its edge striking the same notes of transcendental, mythic beauty that you'd see from a painter of the romantic era. The scene is eerie, mysterious, and it wets Hannibal's curiosity.

If he had not walked this way when he had, visited the property at this very day and time, if he had not glanced out over the water when he did, he might not have seen the man at all. A creature here, seeking solitude and isolation in the same way Hannibal had, one at the water's edge and one in the woods.

Hannibal could walk on, he supposes, dismiss the man and pretend he had not seen him. If he does intend to buy the property it would be better for no one who knows of it to be able to describe his face. And yet...

And yet a person is already here, the isolation of this place breached, rendering it perhaps useless for Hannibal's purposes. And if he doesn't intend to buy it, then there is no reason not to indulge his curiosity and step closer. After all, if need be one body is not hard to hide, and no one knows that Hannibal has ever been here.

Hannibal's footsteps are quiet as he approaches, silent save for the softest rustle of grass as he walks along the path, moving through the shadows of the trees towards the foot of the jetty. It's in as great a state of disrepair as Hannibal remembers from his glance at it on the way in, the wood weathered and stained, its structure barely clinging to shape. A step closer, two, Hannibal out of the trees now, and the man still has not heard him, still has not turned.

The man is even more beautiful up close, what parts of him Hannibal can see. Flawless pale skin that seems to almost glow in the dim moonlight, dark brown hair, almost black, in soft curls. A figure that could be carved of marble, could be one of the great ancient heroes, the likes of Patroclus - beautiful and fair, strong bodied, a figure of tragic beauty.

It's as Hannibal reaches the foot of the jetty, pausing there where the grass ends and the weathered wood begins, the waves shifting on the shore below, a dark susurration, that he realises what is wrong with the image. The black that he'd taken for trousers or perhaps some sort of wrap isn't fabric at all. Dark, gleaming scaled flesh bleeds away seamlessly into pale skin at the line of the man's hips, draped over the side of the jetty. Not legs at all, but something else, the end of a great scaled tail, Hannibal able to catch just the faintest angled glimpse of the bulk of it where it spills out into the water below, dark fins splayed like silk beneath the water, shifting gently in an inky pool.

It sends a cold line down Hannibal's spine, the hair on the back of his neck standing on end. The small, animal part of him that he had murdered when he was just a child whispers to him now, shivering with the sharp impulse to turn and flee, setting his pulse pounding beneath his skin. Hannibal has never been ruled by his own body, nor has he ever let fear be his sovereign, and so with a slow blink the feeling slides away, leaving him staring at the sight with a cool sort of intrigue, tempered with wary curiosity.

Whatever it is he's come upon, it is clear they are not human. Or, at least, not entirely human. Whether they're dangerous Hannibal can't yet say, but the creeping fear he's discarded makes him well inclined to believe yes. Hannibal isn't ruled by his instincts, but that doesn't mean he doesn't know how to heed their warnings.

He steps forward, onto the jetty, the wood creaking gently beneath his weight. One step, two, three, until Hannibal stands well on the jetty, still a good distance behind the man. He - it - must know he's there by now, but he doesn't turn his head. All the better, it allows Hannibal to be the one to break the silence.

"A beautiful night," Hannibal notes, letting his gaze slip beyond the man to look over the dark waters. The waterway is not a deep one, the forest visible on the far bank of the water not a dozen metres away, the calm, hidden place where forest and sea meet, intertwining together like two meeting lovers. "It's a surprise to find someone out here so late."

The statement is something of a falsehood. A surprise to find someone, yes, but not some *thing*. Whatever manner of creature it is he has stumbled upon - siren, or monster or something else entirely - it doesn't surprise Hannibal in the least that it is here late, when the sun has set and most people have already retreated to their homes, in an area that is so remote. It's the same reason Hannibal is here, after all.

Standing here, on the jetty, Hannibal can better see the tail in the water. The view he'd gotten from the shore was misleading, it's size eclipsing what he'd expected, great dark fins spreading for metres beneath the surface, a floating cloud of iridescent scales, completely with thin translucent membranes that shift like smoke through the water, flanking a long serpentine tail. Its true length is impossible to estimate.

"Dangerous thing to do, walking up to a stranger in the dark," the man replies, not sparing Hannibal even a glance, his gaze still fixed over the water. Hannibal still hasn't caught a glimpse of his face. His voice is low, smooth, coming with a clipped edge, sounding almost amused. Even then, the warning in his voice is clear.

Hannibal is trifling with things he doesn't understand, that much is clear, but that won't stop him. Never has he been so presented with a mystery, with the sight of something so beautiful and extraordinary, outside anything that he has ever thought might exist. The chance to witness such a thing is a blessing, and Hannibal won't refuse the gift fate has given him, bringing him here to see this.

Hannibal hums, inclining his head in acquiescence, the smallest of smiles curving across his lips. The mystery has left him charmed, and in a playful mood. "Perhaps. But is it you bringing the danger, or me? A dangerous thing to do, letting a stranger walk up to you in the dark."

That earns a snort, incredulous, and the stranger's head finally swings around to look at him, giving him a narrow eyed look. It's his eyes that catch Hannibal first - a clear shade of grey, almost blue, as cold and clear and deep as staring into icy water, an arctic ocean surging beneath storming winds. His face is handsome. He has a strong jaw, lined with dark stubble, the sort of solemn, beautiful face that speaks of tragedy, so stern and serious and unused to smiling. Or, no, perhaps not unused to it, Hannibal thinks, considering the sweet line of his lips, just so softly pink - just guarded in his smiles, handing them out preciously, in secret.

He's beautiful. Almost inhumanly so. The sort of face a poet might dream of, that an artist puts to paper as the face of a dream, a vision of beauty too great and perfect to ever be real. That is, Hannibal thinks, perhaps even the point.

The man weathers his study with narrowed eyes, mouth set into an unimpressed line. In truth, Hannibal's staring can last only a fraction of a second, his manners too well trained for anything else, Hannibal's self control too absolute, but from the look on the man's face, Hannibal might as well have been gawking openly for an eternity.

Rude then, for all that another might not have noticed it, and Hannibal allows the corner of his lips to turn wry, a look he knows looks handsome on him. "Forgive me," Hannibal says, inclining his head and admitting his crime. "You seem to have caught me unawares - I wasn't expecting to see another person here, nor one so fetching."

That earns another snort, unimpressed, dismissive, the man's gaze still cold as it slides to him, a hostile edge to his gaze. His hands are braced on the jetty to either side of him, and Hannibal notes that they end not in fingers at all, but in deep, black tipped claws. "And here I was almost starting to have a good night. You would have lived longer if you'd just kept walking." His eyes narrow, gaze warning. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't just kill you right now."

Maybe the threat should bring another bolt of fear, should bring some form of apprehension, but all Hannibal feels is a low cool purring of pleasure, the satisfaction of a guess well made. This creature - this man, this stranger, this adonis - is a dangerous thing, as beautiful as he is deadly, and the thought of it only heightens Hannibal's curiosity.

"And lose the pleasure of my company?" Hannibal replies, not bothering to hide his pleasure. He doesn't move forward, doesn't move back, just stands there, fine leather shoes out of place on the worn jetty wood, dark suit out of place across from the creature facing him. Two

worlds, intersecting by chance, as alien as the first fingers of reaching fungal hyphae coming to tangle amongst woven copper wires.

His answer irks the man. He straightens, gaze cutting sharp, voice a cold snap. "Don't think that you could stop me, if I chose to kill you." The fins beneath the water shiver, silken membranes parting to reveal black spines, the lines of which run up the length of his tail, following the curve of it up out of the water, the spines glistening wetly in the cool night air. They seem to move of their own accord, melting out of his flesh and bristling, before just as smoothly melting back, shifting up the line of his tail, his flesh liquid and changeable.

"Oh, I know I couldn't," Hannibal replies easily, not bothering to deny it. Against any man, yes, Hannibal would stand more than a chance. Hannibal is a proud creature, loathe to debase himself amongst the lesser beings he is forced to share the earth with, but here, now, he has no pretensions. What stands before him is something inhuman, a true higher being, wondrous and lethal, and while Hannibal is sure he would put up a good struggle, he has no illusions as to his fate should the man choose to kill him.

That makes the man narrow his eyes, looking Hannibal over now, his gaze sharp, considering. Whatever he sees must - if not impress him - then at least temper his hostility, because he merely scowls, leaning backwards. "I don't find you that interesting," he says, voice clipped.

"I beg to differ," Hannibal says smoothly, and the man's eyes narrow dangerously.

"Is that so?" The man says, voice frigid, the line of his gaze hard and cold.

Hannibal hums, inclining his head, a spark of cold amusement in his gaze, frank and honest. "I'm not dead yet, so there must be something about me you've so far found tolerable." It's a delightful sort of balancing act, to weigh this creature's annoyance against its interest. It's perhaps the most dangerous game Hannibal has ever played, but all the more thrilling for it.

That earns a low snort, sharp, the man's eyes properly cold now. He draws up, slipping from his perch on the jetty entirely as the world begins to shiver, the shuddering of the waves abruptly turning still and quiet as the movement of the water in the waterway stills, the clouds beginning to swirl overhead, darkening and pressing inwards. Fins breach the water, shimmering an iridescence black, pinprick of pale blue light spilling across their surface, dark spills of luminescence as the man draws up and up and up, great fins spilling outwards, breaching the water and rising, the endless coil of that great tail only carrying him higher, until the man is staring down at Hannibal coldly.

Hannibal's heart is thundering in his chest, that tight, terrified voice back inside him once more, threatening to flinch, as Hannibal stares in open awe, enraptured, as the leviathan rises before him, great and terrible and beautiful. The man's body, that great inky mass, bleeds right into the water, no seam between where one ends and the other ends, dark scales and dark water one and the same. Fins appear and melt away fluidly, spines slipping through the water only to disappear, the pale light of his eyes glowing now, moon-bright disks.

And *oh,* Hannibal hadn't been speaking to a creature at all. Higher being, he'd called them earlier, and he hadn't known how right he was until this moment.

The man - the god - narrows his eyes at him. "You want my company? Well then, *human,* make it worth my while."

In an instant, he's gone, form melting away into nothing more than water as the waves once more begin their slow swaying and the gathering clouds fade once more, leaving the end of the jetty empty and silent, not a single trace remaining that anyone had even been there at all. Hannibal is left alone, standing there staring out over the water, pulse beating a sharp tempo beneath his skin.

A slow breath in, two, Hannibal's eyes tracing over the line of the dark water, before rising to look up at the moon - that pale face, so bright and scarred, that for a moment had glowed in the man's eyes. He glances back to the water, a small smirk on his lips, and tilts his head.

"As you command," he tells the empty water, and turns, moving to rejoin the track leading back to the road, where his car awaits. He's been given a challenge, and Hannibal is loathe to disappoint.

Time, perhaps, to try something truly creative.

-

There is, in the following weeks as Hannibal designs his creation and begins the slow process of organising its implementation, the temptation to wonder if he'd perhaps just been stricken by some strange fevered imagining. If any one of his patients came to him and told him that while walking in the dark they had had an encounter with a strange and alien god, Hannibal would quickly add it to a profile of symptoms, pausing only to debate whether delusions or hallucinatory visions would better describe the profile of their neuroses.

It is true, thinking back the encounter is one strange enough to be mistaken as a dream, some strange trick of his own mind, but Hannibal knows himself. There are things wrong with him, but he has never struggled with the truth of his reality, nor does he doubt what he saw. He was awake and fully conscious when it happened, the memory as clear now as if it had happened an hour ago, and Hannibal is not so far gone that he cannot tell when he is awake and when he is asleep.

No, the encounter with the creature, *the god,* was real.

Cursory searches online reveal little information about what he might have met. What descriptions he can give merely summon up folklore and fiction about mermaids and sirens - about krakens, even - but little more. He's not surprised. History is full of tales of men returning from the ocean with wild stories, swearing they've seen monsters beyond imagining, and if Hannibal was to meet a creature beyond human knowledge, he's not surprised it came from the sea. The ocean holds its secrets close even to this day, too great and vast to ever truly be explored, as mysterious and alien a frontier as the vastness of space.

And perhaps Hannibal is a fool for going to these lengths to create a gift for a creature that may never see it. Even as he plans his design, even as he begins gathering its components, its *offerings,* begins the drawn out process of organising the method of its assembly, there is no

saying whether the creature will ever see it. The ocean is vast, and when the man had melted into the water it had been with a sense of finality, a dismissal.

Hannibal suspects he could search every waterline of the world for the rest of his life and never stumble upon the man again. The ocean is too vast, too great, the creature he seeks as fleeting and insubstantial as smoke, and there is no way to win its attention save to do just that - to create a spectacle enough, an offering enough, to make it look despite itself, overcoming its urge to potentially spite him.

Make it worth my while, the man had said, and oh Hannibal intends to.

Hannibal has always been a cautious killer. Not timid by any means, no, entirely too daring at times even, but meticulous, careful. He takes what he needs and he does it in moderation, spacing himself out, obscuring most kills and displaying only a fraction of his works, those whose offences had been enough to truly irk him, demanding elevation. He kills lone individuals, usually, people on their own who can be taken swiftly, easily. When more than one is needed, he takes them one after another, making sure each one is well and truly dealt with before taking care of the next.

This demands something grander. Civilisations all around the globe have practised human sacrifices to the gods, offering blood shed by their own hands and the sparks of their own souls in the service of something greater. The Etruscans, burying headless bodies to serve as the foundations beneath the walls of their temple; the Aztecs, who spilled blood to sate Huitzilopochtli's endless hunger, granting him strength and earning his blessings in turn; the Carthaginians, who slew their own children, infants, thinking them the purest sacrifices of all.

Hannibal's art has always been one involving an element of sacrifice, the transmutation of the mundane, vulgar and ugly into something higher, and this is no different. If he is to make an offering to a god, it will be an ample one, one whose beauty cannot be denied, and one suited to the nature of the creature whose attention he is trying to catch.

A dozen victims, he chooses, flicking through his index of names with careful randomness. They must be from different places, from different walks of life, if he is to get away with taking so many in such a short span of time. Three weeks, he gives himself to gather them, choosing his timing carefully.

The location, the design, is more important than the identity of the bodies themselves. Hannibal's first temptation is to return to that jetty, that shore, to create his work there, but the nature of his gift means it wouldn't be suitable. He has no doubt that if the man chooses to grace him with his presence again, he will find Hannibal no matter where he lays his gift.

Hannibal chooses a remote stretch of shore instead, almost a dozen hours to the north, where a wide grey beach slopes down into cold waves, far enough from humanity that he knows he will not be disturbed. He begins assembly at low tide, in the middle of the night, and leaves in the morning with a tableaux of a dozen bodies spread behind him, sprawled in an intricate, beautiful array. Flowers spill from inside open ribs, lace-like and delicate, stems of blossoms held between bound hands, closed eyes painted shut with dabs of molten silver on their lids, payment for the ferryman, nothing there of them but that - their own bodies, their own flesh,

the bounty of nature and the soft spill of dabs of silver, humanity in a state as it has existed for thousands of years, through the rise and fall of civilisation.

The wave laps at the shore, empty and undisturbed, as Hannibal steps away from his first tableaux, but no matter. He knew going in that the creature he seeks would be more difficult to entice than that. It was always going to take a show of dedication.

In the month that follows he creates a second tableaux, another monstrous offering with a dozen bodies, all carefully arranged to be taken by the tide, and this time paints constellations on their skin. The heavens, echoed in fragile flesh, the divine coming down to touch mortal shells, empty now and souls now fled, each one's right hand turned and left reaching towards the waves, calling for something that will never. Its discovery by a passing fishing boat earns him a new name in the papers, speculation running wild. Apparently the remains of the first one had been found after all, after just long enough for them to be degraded so little evidence was left, leaving the police mystified.

The Mariner, is the name they give him, as the second offering is found half chewed up by the tide, but Hannibal pays it no mind, already planning a third.

The Aztecs, when they offered their sacrifices, tore their victims open from throat to pelvis and removed their hearts, offering them to the gods while the bodies were thrown back down the temple steps. Not all of those sacrificed were slaves or captives, some walking to their deaths willingly, volunteers for a greater purpose. Hannibal is not praying to their god, but the thought is one that sticks with him.

The third tableaux he arranges in the water, hammering the wooden stakes deep into the sand during low tide and returning as the water comes in to begin arranging it. Another dozen bodies, arranged in a great spiral beneath the wavers, their chests torn open, their arms extended, rising above the lapping of the water to offer their own hearts to the sky, willing gifts, an entreaty and an offering and a plea all at once.

Hannibal is still in the process of arranging the last bodies when he feels a telling shiver down his spine, the lapping of the waves beginning to grow still. It's dawn, or near about, the water nearly up to his waist and only rising. Sea life had already begun to converge as he worked, drawn curiously by the scent of meat in the water, and Hannibal hadn't tried to deter them. Working with the tide has instilled a new appreciation of the liminal in him, the ephemeral - art, created over the course of hours and weeks to exist only in a single moment, beginning to be dissolved again slowly even as its made, order and entropy existing hand in hand.

The appearance of his guest is marked only by an increase in their number, the sand suddenly dark with churning limbs as crabs crawl up the posts and eels slip between the bodies, fish brushing against Hannibal's waders as they slip past him, converging in on the scene. He isn't surprised when he glances up and finds a figure standing across the array.

He looks much the same as when Hannibal had last seen him - a fine, handsome man, pale skinned and with dark hair, those storm grey eyes looking over the scene Hannibal has created. He's as bare as he was, nothing clothing his chest, the waters around him turned inky

with sprawling fins, whose spine shift, brushing against Hannibal's leg, a there and gone again touch, fluid and ever-changing.

Hannibal had known he hadn't dreamt up the encounter, but the man's handsomeness still catches him by surprise. He's as beautiful as Hannibal remembers, more beautiful than Hannibal remembers, even, though he hadn't even known that would be possible. Hannibal's memory is, of course, perfect.

"I wonder, do your own kind consider you monstrous?" The man asks, stepping through the bodies to stand in the centre of the array. He passes through them like smoke through air, insubstantial, untouched, gliding forward to stand in the centre of it all, the bodies sprawled around him in a twisting pattern, bloody hearts all held aloft in supplication, water lapping at their arms. He looks over the array with a thoughtful eye, studying the sleeping faces hidden beneath the surface.

Hannibal makes a noncommittal noise, amused, watching him take in the scene. "Certainly," he admits, tone low and easy. "But do you?"

The man scoffs, glancing over the tableaux, to where a shark has glided over to nose at one of the outer bodies, the water frothing as it begins to tear into it. It's sleek, small, with a pale grey back, but hungry all the same. The water is thick with movement now, creatures descending and beginning to feast. At this rate the scene will be completely consumed before it is even found. No matter. Hannibal did not create it for mortal eyes.

The man's gaze lingers on the shark for a second before slipping away, the twist of his lips harsh and amused. "Mercy isn't in my nature."

"Then what is?" Hannibal asks, even as he leans down to lash together the final finishing touches. The nylon line is slick between his fingers, slippery in the water, and just for once Hannibal has forgone gloves in favour of his bare hands. If the police ever find the scene, the water will keep them from finding any prints.

The man sends him a sharp look, amused despite himself. "Fickleness," he replies, voice wry, an edge of humour there, almost self-deprecating. "Some call me cruel, humans mostly. Animals don't have nearly such a... self-aggrandising sense of morality." One of the sharks has slid forth, making its way into the inside of the array, weaving between the bodies to come at press against the man's side, and he rests a hand on its head, stroking clawed fingers down its pale back, the look in his eyes almost fond.

"We do tend to be rather egotistical, don't we?" Hannibal says wryly, tying off the last piece of line and finally stepping back. It earns him a sideways glance, the man's expression amused. Hannibal's eyes aren't on him however, taking the moment instead to look over his creation - a dozen bloodied hearts, rising from the water in offering to the heavens, their bodies shadowed beneath the waves, already beginning to be consumed by the thronging sea-life. There's a poetry to that as well, one he finds he can enjoy, for all that it theoretically cuts short the beauty of the scene he had spent so long putting together.

"What's the verdict then," Hannibal says, finally breaking his moment of silence, eyes turning to the man once more, a wry smile curving the corner of his lips. "Have my gifts been well

received?"

The man hums, noncommittal, gaze flat as he looks over the scene once more - it amuses him to keep Hannibal on the knife's edge, it seems. "They've kept my creatures busy," he says, a half answer. "Well fed."

"And you?" Hannibal asks, undeterred. Perhaps it's dangerous to press, but Hannibal is nothing if not bold.

That earns a glance, the cut of the man's gaze amused. He lets out a breath, eyes flicking back over the tableaux of bodies. "I'll admit to being entertained. It's rare to see a human with such.... unique artistry."

Hannibal near preens at that, the surge of pleasure the compliment brings a dangerous thing. "Enough to earn a boon?"

The man's eyes narrow at that, the air suddenly turning sharp, drawn tight with tension. The weight of the man's gaze is predatory, cold, the effect of standing before him, beneath the harsh cut of that gaze, like standing before every predator in the ocean. In that second, Hannibal stands on the verge of being consumed alive, able to almost feel the great fanged maw that yawns open beneath him. It's exhilarating. Hannibal hasn't felt so alive since the first time he killed a man.

"Tell me your desire," the man says, his voice cold, a sharpness to his expression that threatens to cut, closed off and hostile. "And I'll decide if your insolence can be forgiven enough to earn you a quick death."

"Hannibal," Hannibal says, eyes meeting the man's, restraining his voice just shy of pleased pur. He inclines his head. "That's my name. All I ask is that you remember it."

"Hannibal," the man says, rolling the word around on his tongue, tasting it. Hearing it from his mouth sends a shiver down Hannibal's spine. The man's eyes narrow a little, but he hums. "I'll forgive you your insolence, just this once."

Then he's disappearing back into the water, melting away into nothing but shadows, and then not even that, leaving Hannibal standing there in the surf beside the churning throng of ocean life, his heart thundering in his chest. His hand tightens into a fist, and then slowly loosens, fingers flexing, the smallest of pleased smiles on his lips. He turns, leaving soon after that, abandoning his art to the mercy of the man's creatures. As much as he'd like to continue watching them receive his gifts, the scavenging process will take hours and Hannibal would deeply prefer to not be caught before he has the chance to meet him again.

Because they *will* meet again, Hannibal will ensure it.

-

During all his years at John Hopkins, Hannibal has rarely taken leave. He prefers to keep a full schedule, both professionally and socially, and the fact that so many are there to witness

his long hours in the emergency room means few think to question whether it would be possible for him to find the time for other, more intensive pursuits.

Through careful planning and several nights of lost sleep, he'd managed to put together his three tableaux without having to take time off work. No doubt it stuns his colleagues entirely when Hannibal puts in an application for leave, let alone one of such duration, having previously not said a word of any intent to take a holiday.

"Two weeks," one of the nurses notes, surprised, as she looks over the coming roster. Maria Alvarez, is her name, one of the few nurses that Hannibal is perfectly pleased to be on shift with at any given time. Faultlessly polite, with a gentle bedside manner, and a cold, steely sort of competence that puts many of her co-workers to shame.

"It felt like time to take a break," Hannibal replies, as he pours himself a cup of coffee from his thermos. The break room is tiny and cluttered but does, perhaps unsurprisingly, have a coffee machine of its own. You couldn't pay Hannibal to drink what comes out of it. He makes his own and brings it in, and has even on occasion - when it would be indescribably rude not to - shared some of it with his co-workers.

"That's good," Maria nods, as she finishes flipping through the roster, pinning it back up on the wall. "You work too hard, Dr Lecter. All those shifts at the hospital, and covering for others as well - you need to catch up on some sleep."

"It'll take more than two weeks for me to catch up completely, but I will try," Hannibal replies, amused, earning a commiserating glance in return. The hours of an emergency room surgeon are gruelling, and most men would begin to buckle beneath the weight of just that, let alone all the other obligations Hannibal keeps up.

Maria gives a nod. "Rest well, the rest of us will simply have to manage until you return."

Maria might have been the first to notice the leave, but it's not through her that the ward gossip will begin its rounds. She's polite like that. No, the stories will begin to spin the moment one of the other nurses or doctors take a proper look at the schedule, and no doubt when Hannibal returns it'll be in time to begin putting out the fires of whatever outlandish rumours have sprung up about how he's spent his time.

Hannibal is a social creature, but odd, enigmatic, and it makes him something of a source of fascination amongst the ward. It's his suits, his parties, his unabashed passion for art and music and the culinary delights. Still, so long as they're gossiping about that, they're not wondering what else he might be doing with his time.

When the day of his leave comes, Hannibal packs and lets his flight take him. The separation between Canada and the northwest United States is a thin one, but one thing that can be said of Canada is the beauty of its forests and the vastness of its shores. The chalet he's booked is a beautiful thing, remote, isolated, in a corner chosen specific for its similarity to the place where he and the man had first met - the intersection of forest and water, where one of the reaching fingers of the sea claws into the land. Isolated, out of sight, peaceful, with a beauty and tranquillity that sets the mind at ease.

Leaves carpet the ground, fallen, the woods a mix of deciduous trees beginning to bear their autumn colours and evergreen pines, the air fresh and cool. The chalet itself is a pretty thing, a modern composition with an expansive kitchen - which suits Hannibal - and a path that leads down to the edge of a water, where a pier sits, empty of boats - which suits what Hannibal came here for.

There's a beautiful air of solitude to the place, to the rising shadow of the trees, to the coolness of the air and the soft lapping of the waves, no sound here than that created by nature's own hand, and by Hannibal. It is, in the end, perfectly suited to a moment of quiet reflection, as Hannibal had hoped it would be. He only hopes it's just as suitable for his other purpose in turn.

The sky is overcast the next morning, the light soft and the waters calm as Hannibal begins his set up. A single chair, carried out to the end of the pier, the violin case set down beside it. The violin is not Hannibal's preferred instrument, but he's near as skilled with it as he is with the harpsichord and it will do for his purposes here, since hauling out a harpsichord - or dare he say it, a piano - is more monumental an effort than even Hannibal is willing to consider.

He takes his seat, raising the instrument, a beautiful thing of dark varnished wood, and lets his eyes flick half closed as the first humming note is drawn across the string. The air is fresh and cool, ever so slightly damp, and it stirs in his lungs as the first notes of the melody begin to ring over the water, carrying out to the distant trees. He has no music stand before him, needs no such guidance, instead closing his eyes as he begins to play from memory alone.

Three days, he spends, playing at the edge of the water, notes filtering out and echoing over through the trees, turning through one song after another, and then simply playing his own, putting together notes as they come to create something new, simply for the joy of doing it. In the time in between, he reads, he cooks, he catches up on his drawing, availing himself of the silence and peace offered by the chalet, before inevitably returning to pick up his violin once more and walk to the edge of the pier.

Three days, and then four, Hannibal rising early, when the morning is still young and the light is still soft and dim, to stand at the end of the pier and play. There is no sign that someone has joined him, no sound, no change in the air, between one moment and the next a presence simply appearing behind him, the hairs rising on the back of Hannibal's neck.

"No more corpses?" the man asks, where he leans against the side of the pier, arms folded there, chin resting in one hand, the rest of him disappearing into the water. If Hannibal did not know better, he'd mistake him for someone who'd only been swimming, a man coming up to take a pause against the side of the pier before getting out, the only visible parts of him too easy to mistake as just human.

Even then, he looks like a classical beauty. Water runs down his sides, leaving his skin glistening, dark hair turned black with it. A nymph, Hannibal might call him, some thing of beauty meant to tempt and beguile, all the most dangerous parts of him hidden for the moment by the illusion of space, a lure meant to draw men in between hungry, waiting teeth. Not the guise of a boy, some nimble supple youth, but a man - strong, fine, with sharp eyes, a creature in its prime, mature and ready.

Hannibal doesn't stop playing, but he does let the melody grow more muted, something easier to talk over. "I wouldn't want you to think I'm capable of only one type of artistry," Hannibal says smoothly, more pleased that he can say that his gambit has worked. "It would be a shame to grow predictable."

"You're so sure that you will see me again," the man says and Hannibal smiles, still not pausing in his melody. Even now he's so wary, so hostile, a snarling dog baring its teeth at the hand that reaches out to feed it. Proud, Hannibal thinks, and for good reason. He's not surprised the man disdains human company, nor thinks himself above it. He is above it.

"If you really did not wish to see me, you could deny me easily enough," Hannibal says, amused. "And yet here you are, honouring this lowly human with your presence."

"You take many liberties, human."

"Hannibal," Hannibal corrects, finally stopping playing and lowering his violin as he looks at the man. His expression is measured, and he inclines his head, a soft entreaty. "Please."

The man's eyes narrow in displeasure, those sharp black claws digging into the wood of the pier, the softest touch enough to leave lines. "I've killed men for less. You're certainly bold, *Hannibal.* "

To hear his name coming from the man's lips sends a shiver down Hannibal's spine. It feels, he thinks, like the first sip of the finest wine, like the soft moment of pleasure that comes with a forkful of some beautiful, delicate delight just touching between his lips, the first taste of it beginning to spill along his tongue. The sensation is intoxicating, heady, the pleasure he gets from it entirely too dangerous. How it strokes the ego, hearing his name fall from the tongue of a god.

The man pushes off from the edge of the pier, beginning to circle now, water rippling as black scales shift beneath the surface. "What is it exactly that you want from me?" The man asks sharply, eyes fixed on Hannibal, the pace of his circling smooth and predatory, lethal, eyes taking on once more that pale moon glow. His hair, which had been cut short last Hannibal had seen it, now spills down his shoulders in waves, dripping into the water. In this moment, he looks less than human, *more* than human, impossibly to mistake as anything simply natural - movements too smooth, too sleek, too dangerous.

"Is it not enough to merely wish to be graced with your company?" Hannibal asks, meeting his eyes, turning in a faint circle as the man makes a ring of the pier, and the man scoffs.

"As if it would ever be something so simple. No. I know you, human, *Hannibal.* I know your nature. Men always desire more." The man pauses, having reached the other side of the pier now, claws scraping on the wood as he looks at Hannibal with cold eyes, scorn twisting his lips. "You think you're the only one to have ever seen me? To have ever tried to summon me? Their fate was not pleasant, nor will yours be. Stop the pretence," he says coldly, voice like ice. "Tell me what you want."

He's risen, his eyes level with Hannibal's now, enough to reveal the seething fabric of fins and scales that pours into the water below him, shifting and undulating, rows of spines melting up

along black scales and disappearing again, fins splaying beneath the water like great black sails. He stops an inch from Hannibal's face, eyes meeting his. The waves have risen up around the shore, choppy, disturbed, the air pulled into a tight wind, biting and cold, all the elements of the world responding to the man's fury. He looks dangerous, deadly. Looks eldritch. Looks-

"Beautiful," Hannibal breathes.

The man's face twists, eyes flashing, bright and then clawed hands are seizing Hannibal, cutting bloody tracks against skin as he's dragged beneath the water. There's no warning, no fighting, just a brutal flipping of a switch - claws digging in, and frigid water closing over his head as Hannibal is yanked from the pier. He gasps, lungs seizing, the shock of it abrupt, the weight of the water only increasing as he's dragged downwards, black coiling around him. Down here, the man's body is immense, leviathan, a world serpent of black shifting scales, writhing in a coil, fins splayed outwards, drifting like silk in the water, claws closing tighter around Hannibal's arm, feeding clouds of red into the water as Hannibal is pulled deeper.

Beauty, you say, the man's voice says, spoken directly into Hannibal's head as he drags him down, one clawed hand coming to tighten around his throat. Hannibal's lungs are already burning for air, claws biting in and stinging where they touch fragile skin. Through the spreading fins and coiling scales, Hannibal can see the flicker of shadows moving, sharks gliding in frantic, hungry circles, brought to froth.

The hand tightens around his throat, the man suddenly before him, those bright eyes moon-pale and empty, pupilless, black hair spreading in a cloud around him as he brings Hannibal into the very heart of his coils. *Will you still believe me beautiful when the air finally leaves your lungs? When you feel the first teeth against your skin? Will you still admire me then, as my children take you apart piece by piece?*

Where is your beauty now, Hannibal? Will you admire me still, as I break your bones between my teeth? The creature coils around him, inky in the water, claws tightening even further around Hannibal's throat, Hannibal able to feel the pulse of his own blood as it spills around his claws. The creature bares fanged teeth, jagged and sharp, all humanity stripped from him, the illusion fractured and his true form laid bare - seething scales and teeth, spines and black water, a long scaled body that pulses with deep inner light.

And Hannibal-

Hannibal has never been so entranced. There is blood in the water, flowing from a dozen tiny stinging cuts, every single place the creature's claws have brushed him, clouds of its smoky around him. His lungs are burning, screaming, sobbing for breath, the water crushing in. Hannibal cares for none of it, his attention transfixed. The creature, the man- He's *magnificent.*

Hannibal's hand lifts, slow and heavy in the water, thumb coming to brush the creature's cheek, so soft, even as his own vision starts to darken. If he is to die, he wants this creature's face to be the last sight he sees. His thumb strokes a line across his cheek, so reverent, so gentle, hand cupping the line of his jaw. His skin is so cold against Hannibal's, the inhuman

temperature of a creature that dwells deep beneath the end of the light, and softly, Hannibal smiles.

Eyes widen, shocked, that pale moon glow faltering, and then the next thing Hannibal knows he's being tossed back onto the shore, heaving and coughing, clawing at the sand as he chokes on seawater. There's blood running down his neck, staining his shirt, and his arm is in no better state, run through with bleed cuts but-

But he's alive.

He rolls onto his back, his clothes soaked, the taste of salt thick on his tongue, finally managing to draw in an even breath. When he glances towards the water, all signs of the creature, of *him,* are already gone, the water once more still and empty . Even now, the look of surprise on his face lingers in Hannibal's mind - the way those pale eyes had widened in shock, flickering back to that stormy grey for a split second, Hannibal savouring the memory.

It takes Hannibal two hours to stitch up the wounds the man had left on him, after he manages to drag himself back up into the chalet, and at the end of it he has a total of forty-three stitches. The worst of them are on his arm, where the claws had dug in and dragged brutal lines through his skin, curving down his forearm. The cuts on his neck, while shallower, are no less expensive, the longest of them cutting a narrow line from just below the curve of his jaw to the hollow of his throat.

Hannibal has always been careful to get no visible scars from his work, but he cannot regret these one, the physical marks the man has left on him. Hannibal touches the cut on his neck gently, now cleaned, now sewn shut, hidden beneath gauze, and finds himself enjoying the sting of it, a reminder. It seems apt. Courting a god is not without price.

It's just as well, he supposes, that he has another week and a half before he's due back. He'll be able to make up some excuse, perhaps some sort of traffic accident, and while it'll earn glances, it'll all be forgotten about again soon enough.

His wrist is too injured to play the next day, but he goes to the water regardless, taking with him his sketchbook as carries out his chair once more to sit on the pier. It's slightly awkward finding a position in which he can draw without abusing his injured arm too badly, but Hannibal manages it and he spends the rest of the day putting images of the man to paper.

He fills pages with him, not just his human face, but the vision of him as he had been when he dragged Hannibal into the water, all sharp-teeth and spines, all twining tail and wild black hair, eyes that shone in the water like lanterns. The image of the abyss, of the deep leviathan, shedding its human shell and baring its hunger.

An hour, two, after Hannibal begins drawing a mist starts to grow on the water. The sky is still overcast and grey, autumn weather at its finest, the lapping of the waves soft against the posts of the pier. The mist is pale, thin and cool, creeping slowly up the shore and through the treeline, coming to fog the small bay. Hannibal stays despite the chill, the scratch of pencil on paper a melody. He won't return into the chalet yet, not when it risks him missing the man. Logically he knows that if the man chooses to return he will be able to find Hannibal no

matter where he has wandered, but Hannibal can't help but feel that any departure now would be a concession of loss, and he won't stand for it.

The hours drag on, the sun dragging low on the horizon, the shadows in the mist growing, until all the world is grey fog and cool water, the tips of rising evergreens. He barely hears the moment the water goes still, the constant background melody of the lapping waves drawing unnaturally silent.

Hannibal's pencil pauses on the page, and when he glances up, eyes flitting slowly upwards, it's to the sight of the man sitting on the edge of the pier, only a few feet away, those storm grey eyes watching him. The man tilts his head when Hannibal's eyes meet his, his expression unreadable, something heavy in his gaze.

"I wonder," the man says, voice low, questioning now. "Would you have sat here through the night if I hadn't come? Stayed even when the morning light broke, with still no sign of me?"

"I suppose we shall never know," Hannibal replies, a smile growing on his lips, setting down his sketchbook. The man looks human again, or as human as he ever had, his teeth one more flat and even, eyes an icy grey, hair shorter again, cut close to his head, no longer draping around his shoulders. Hannibal resists the urge to let his eyes trace down the rest of him, to study the line where pale skin dips and gives way to black scales at his naval, to fix his eyes on the length of that tail and watch as fins melt in and out of his forms, bristling spines coming and going, spilling sleek like oil through the water. Holds back the desire to reach out, to touch, to feel what those glistening scales feel like between their fingertips, the sleek wet glide of those spines as they emerge and disappear.

The man makes a noncommittal noise, his posture easy and casual as he perches on the end of the pier. He leans over, picking up Hannibal's abandoned sketchbook and flipping through it, black claws delicate on pale paper. His eyes flicker over the pages, skimming each one, because pausing on Hannibal's most recent drawing of the man, the most eldritch of his depictions so far. In it the man looks nothing short of monstrous, a writhing shadow bleeding through the water, a snarling face staring out a great serpentine bulk. Terrifying, but beautiful, so beautiful, Hannibal's awe shining through in every line of the sketch.

"I suppose I shouldn't be surprised you have a twisted sense of beauty," the man says, leaning back, still looking at the drawing, a single clawed finger tracing a line along the design. "All things considered."

Hannibal makes a rebuking noise, ready to argue. "Is it not enough to simply appreciate beauty for its own sake?" Hannibal replies. "Why should I let other people's morals and insecurities constrain my own admiration?"

The man snorts, turning the page back to peer at another drawing of himself, this one more human - the nymph he'd been, arms resting on the edge of the pier, staring up at Hannibal with narrowed eyes, fey and wild. "Isn't that what you humans are all about?" he replies, a dry note in his voice. "Culture. Shared perception. It's the only reason you're even half as prevalent as you are."

Hannibal hums, not denying it but not agreeing either. It is true, shared cognition has been the greater driving force of humanity's creation, the thing that sets them apart from mere beasts. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious would say that all people shared the same underlying cognition - a series of fears and understandings, biological drives, all minds connected by a single base thread, though a surface topography of a person's mind may vary. In this, all morals, all evils, all fears, all virtues, exist as absolutes, shared by every mind, steel laws unvarying in every person.

Hannibal is not so sure he agrees. Some fears may be common, existing across people of all times and spaces - fear of the dark, of abandonment, of eyes that watch from somewhere unseen - but each person's fear is their own, a new flower grown in a barren garden, sprung from fresh seed even if it grows to be influenced by the shapes of what is found around it. Hannibal's sense of beauty, of morality, is different than his peers, created entirely by his own hand. Others may have had a hand in shaping him, but the artist's hand sculpting him has always been his own.

Perhaps any other member of his species might fear this man, might look at him and be able to do nothing but flinch back in terror, but Hannibal is not them. He is first and foremost an appreciator of beauty, of lethality - and the man before him is both beautiful, and lethal.

It is not the moment to press that point however. Hannibal looks at the drawing in the man's hands instead, nodding his head. "Do you like it? Keep it if you wish. Consider it a gift."

That earns his a narrow eyed look, wary, suspicious, great coils shifting in the water. "And in return I suppose you want another boon. Were the wounds I left on you not gift enough?"

Hannibal smiles, unfazed, and inclines his head. The cuts on his neck ache with the movement, the sting of them a pleasant thing. "Give me a name to call you by," he says, daring. "You know mine, the reverse seems only fitting."

"The name of a god in return for a few scraps of paper," the man says, claws tightening around the sketchbook, sending Hannibal a look. "Your boldness only grows, Hannibal."

"Perhaps," Hannibal admits easily. It's easy to give the concession when he already feels the pleasure of hearing the man use his name. "But I've yet to regret it."

"Most would fear me, after the wounds I left on you yesterday. And yet here you are, still wet with the scent of blood as you seek me out again," the man says, studying Hannibal. He closes the sketchbook but doesn't set it down again, his gaze thoughtful now as he studies Hannibal. "Some might call that a death-wish."

"Do you?" Hannibal asks, truly curious, and the man's lips twist, his smile a sardonic thing, leaning back.

"Perhaps," he says, voice low, easy. "But you amuse me yet, so you'll live."

"Then my request...?"

The man makes a low amused noise, studying Hannibal, the weight of his gaze a sharp, curious thing. Hannibal's fingers itch to pick up his pencil and draw him again, to capture him in this moment - the wry look of amusement in his eyes, half considering. "Will," he finally says, voice quiet. "You may call me Will."

"Will," Hannibal says, speaking the name like it is something precious. He wonders if it's short for something, the name more human than Hannibal might have expected from a creature like him. The way Will's eyes narrow slightly at hearing his name spoken makes a shiver go down Hannibal's spine.

"To be on a first name basis with a god," Will says, his eyes sharp, voice so dry as to be cutting. "I suppose it strokes your ego."

"Oh, immensely," Hannibal says, voice a pur, and Will makes a noise of sharp amusement, not having expected him to admit to it. Hannibal is well aware of his own faults, his pride among them. He has to be. After all, self-awareness is the only thing that draws the line between pride and arrogance, and while Hannibal is willing to indulge one, he will not the other. Arrogance is rudeness, arrogance is blindness, a lack of awareness and sensitivity. Arrogance is asking to be caught.

"I wonder," Will says, eyes fixed on Hannibal thoughtfully, consideration in his gaze. "What game is it you think you're playing here exactly? Where do you think this path you're treading will lead you?"

"I ask for only one thing." Hannibal says, dark eyes meeting Will's as he leans down, taking one of Will's clawed hands in his. His skin is cold, still wet from the ocean despite the fact Hannibal had not yet seen them today touch the water. Hannibal raises his hand to his lips, just shy of touching, holding those dark claws in his hands. His eyes meet Will's, lips hovering just above his knuckles. "Permission."

It's an audacious move, one that could all too easily end in his death, his body lost to the ocean and Will's creatures, but Hannibal has come too far to back down now. If Will truly has no care for him then no amount of time will change the fact, but if he does...

Well, fortune favours the bold.

Will's eyes narrow, a dangerous flash going through them, moon pale, but he does not remove his hand, and Hannibal takes that as permission enough. He raises Will's hand that last inch, pressing a gentle kiss into his knuckles, skin soft and stinging with the taste of salt, before drawing back, eyes rising once more to meet Will's.

"Will you accept another gift from me, if I prepare one?" Hannibal asks, gently releasing Will's hand and leaning back in his chair. He has pushed enough for one day. Any more is likely to toe over the line from endearing boldness to utter insolence, and if there is one thing Hannibal is not it's rude

"We'll see," Will says sharply, his voice clipped, drawing back. His eyes are cold as they meet Hannibal's, a taunting note in his voice. "Speak my name, if you dare. We'll see if your gift is enough to earn you the liberties you've taken. Impress me, Hannibal."

A single blink, the wind whispering through the air, breeze shifting in the fog, and Will is gone, the ocean before Hannibal once more empty and silent, the waves once more picking up their lapping on the shore. He sits back in his chair, a low smile on his lips, closing his eyes and just enjoying the noise of the waves moving.

His next gift will have to be something special, something truly special. Hannibal looks forward to it.

-

What Hannibal's colleague at John Hopkins think when he returns from his holiday only to shortly thereafter announce the intention for a four month sabbatical, he doesn't know and he doesn't much care. The injured he'd come back with - explained away as the result of a car crash, another incautious driver on the road whose vehicle had struck Hannibal's while he was vacationing - helps explain it a little, and Hannibal only has to make a few noises about feeling weary and thinking about spending some time writing up some papers for the hospital to be falling over itself offering him the chance to take some time off.

Hannibal is a useful tool in their belt, after all, and one they want kept sharp. Better to let him take the time off - and potentially publish some papers under their name while he's at it - than risk him getting burned out and simply deciding to move on entirely.

It's a more reckless approach than Hannibal has ever taken to his professional life, usually so careful to keep everything neat and in order, but Hannibal can't bring himself to care. His work at the hospital is diverting, the skills his training as a surgeon has furnished him with even moreso, but the fortune he's inherited means he wouldn't have to work a day in his life if he didn't want to. In the end, it's not like he couldn't easily find himself a position at another hospital - here or back in Europe - or make the transition to another trade easily enough should his work lose its lustre and become a hindrance.

His last gifts to Will have been well received, but they've been paltry, shallow. This one is a true courting gift, something that needs to impress, and it will require time and thought to put together. More than that, if Hannibal is to execute it properly he needs to be in good health. His arm is healing well, his neck too, but Hannibal can hardly hunt in a weakened state, and he's not willing to risk his prey overpowering him if a stray twinge gives him away.

No, Hannibal needs to heal, and he needs to plan. This next gift he gives must be perfect, and that means he must take the time to select it well.

Hannibal spends the first month and a half of his sabbatical healing and doing careful research. He spends weeks alone evaluating targets, dismissing one after another. He's not willing to settle for a paltry offering this time. His last sacrifices had been inconsequential, their identities of no note, useful only for the canvas they created, but this time he must give something more, something with meaning.

He does finally settle on a target. He knows he has the right one the moment he reads the man's name, feeling the rightness of it settle in his bones, and pauses to flip over a blank piece of card, writing the name on it in neat letters, black in stark on the pale card, the man's fate now sealed.

Even then, time is still needed for preparations. Hannibal cannot act immediately. Healing takes time, and even after the wounds themselves have closed and begun to scar, the flesh remains tender. He waits instead, returns to his exercise regime with gentle patience, working carefully on his physiotherapy. There are medicines he could take to reduce the scarring, but Hannibal does not take them - the wounds were Will's gift to him, and Hannibal will not see them reduced for the sake of vanity. The reminder of them is enough, bringing Hannibal's mind back to the marvel that created them every time he catches sight of pale silvered skin in the mirror.

Instead, Hannibal hones his techniques while he waits. He has an idea in mind already of how he wants to carry this out and so he brushes up in preparation, booking a flight to Japan to commission a new set of knives in northern Fukui. Echizen is the city known for its blacksmiths and artisans, its bladework, but the place Hannibal heads is even more rural than that.

Three weeks, he spends there, learning how to use his new blades under the curt tutelage of a nearly blind old woman and when he's done Hannibal leaves her with his thanks and a sum in her bank account enough to buy most of the surrounding town combined.

Then, only then, now healed and with the knives acquired, does Hannibal fly to Puerto Peñasco in Sonora, Mexico. Three days he spends staking out his mark, before lifting him easily, almost gently, from his seaside condo. The man barely has time to realise he's there, unconscious before he even hears the first sound of someone slipping up behind him, and by the time he wakes Hannibal already has him handcuffed to the kitchen table of his rented villa.

The villa itself is a beautiful thing, all orange clay walls and grand vaulted windows, nearly two hours north of the city itself, perched on a cliff-side above the sea, the gulf of California with its vibrant blue water visible below. A house in the old, classic style, but with all the modern delights, its floor beautiful sparkling tile, its kitchen composed of wide gleaming countertops, the house opening onto a great stone deck that overlooks the ocean, the table there already set with decorations.

"Be still." Hannibal says, as the man begins to stir, begins to struggle, eyes flying open wide has he realises he's been bound, letting out a muffled shout around his gag. The man yanks fruitlessly at his bindings. "We wouldn't want to bruise the meat."

Hannibal stands in the kitchen, giving his knives a last reading sharpen, the cool scrape of it low and steady. The noise only makes the man more panicked, breath coming fast, sweat beading on his skin as he fruitlessly tries to struggle. It's no use, of course. Hannibal wouldn't risk allowing him to escape, not when so much rides on his presence.

The man screams as Hannibal makes the first cut, and he keeps screaming as the *yanagiba* knife dances in Hannibal's hand, the blade a delicate thing, thin and narrow, designed specifically for fish, for cutting the perfect narrow fillets of sashimi. Hannibal makes it work to a different purpose now, extracting cut after cut of raw, bloodied, bleeding meat.

The man thrashes, beating his wrists and ankles bloody, screaming himself raw, but no matter. He's not meant to go on display and Hannibal wont risk spoiling the meat with drugs,

not this time. By the time Hannibal gets around to extracting his liver, the man has expired, breath finally going still in his bloody mouth, his tongue already carefully removed and set aside with the sirloin cuts. Blood loss, it seems, but it's hardly any matter. The man had still been living when Hannibal extracted all his chosen cuts, and that had been his priority.

Hannibal rinses the worst of the blood off each cut, the meat still warm to the touch, and lays them reverently on a tray before taking them out to the station he's set up on the deck, his cutting board and knives already set out and waiting for him, nestled amongst what fine things Hannibal could find to accent the table.

The sun is warm overhead, the breeze a sweet thing, summery and tanged with salt, bringing with it the scent of the flowers growing in the villa's garden. His blade glides in his hand as he carefully manoeuvres each cut, slicing them into sheer, almost transparent layers, and laying them out still raw on the waiting plates. The arrangement of sashimi is as much an art as the cutting of it, and Hannibal takes all possible care. Flowers bloom beneath his fingers, still damp with the touch of blood, the dark meat of the tongue spilling like undulating waves across the plate, looping back on itself to form a winding circle, spiralling to a fine point.

When Hannibal looks up from his work, his hands damp with blood, the last delicate, decorated piece finally laid ready on the plate, it's to find eyes watching him. Hannibal smiles, setting the plate to the side before turning to wipe his hands.

"Will," Hannibal greets warmly.

"I see you have another gift for me," Will says, eyes glancing over the spread, lingering on the centrepiece at the table. The bones of an osprey, articulate, wings still spread, extend across the centre of the table, red blossoms spilling out from inside the empty space of its bleached ribs, dripping red onto the table, dark and beautiful in the evening light. A fishing bird, one that partakes of Will's children, now stripped bare to be displayed for him in turn, fine plates of sheer red meat set around the table around it.

Will stands on the edge of the deck, for the first time that Hannibal has ever seen him bearing a pair of human legs. He's dressed, wearing a pair of worn blue jeans paired with a faded red flannel shirt. With the addition of his stubble, he looks like any of a hundred fishermen Hannibal might see at any port town, just another passing face in the crowd, human and unremarkable.

Hannibal merely nods, stepping back as he removes his apron and begins to wind his sleeves back down. "Wine?" Hannibal asks, already rounding the table to pull out a pair of waiting glasses. "I have a Les Celliers du Prieure, Muscadet, 1871, that will pair wonderfully with the meal."

Will makes an amused noise, eyes flitting sideways to him before dropping back to the meat, but he inclines his head. Hannibal smiles, pouring them each a generous glass before turning to put the last touches to the table, ensuring the dishes lie just-so. It's rare that he puts in this much effort for just a seating of two people, but Hannibal is out to impress. Will deserves his best and Hannibal will not leave him disappointed.

"Do you always serve your victims to your guests?" Will asks, taking a step around the table, his gaze wry and amused as he studies the cuts of glistening meat, each one paper thin and folded into beautiful shape.

"I take pride in my cooking," Hannibal replies, setting the bottle of wine down and moving to bring the glasses to each of their seats. The china is one of his own sets, brought with him from home specifically for the purpose. Two seats have been arranged across from one another, sharing intimate space at one end of the table. "I enjoy sharing my food, and my guests enjoy eating it, though few ever bother to ask where I source my meat. Perhaps they prefer not to know."

Will makes a low noise, looking over the table. He stops in front of his seat and lifts his wine, bringing it to his nose and sniffing, before taking a sip. "What am I looking at?" Will asks, nodding towards the plates.

Hannibal smiles, pleased for the chance to show off. "Basashi, one might call it, if it were horse. Sirloin, tongue, and liver, served with soy sauce, grated ginger, and fresh shiso leaves."

"Definitely not horse," Will notes, casting a wry glance into the villa, where the expired remains of the donor are still visible on the table, dripping blood into the floor. Hannibal will have to clean it up later. It's a more gruesome scene than he might usually allow within sight of the meal itself, but that the ingredients be fresh and collected while the man was still living were important to him. The pain the man endured is one part of the gift Hannibal is offering here.

Still, Will does not seem put off. He'd shown little consternation when standing before Hannibal's previous sacrifices, human morality apparently below him, and Hannibal is gratified to have his hunch proved correct when Will rounds the last few steps to stand behind his chair, taking the waiting pair of chopsticks in hand and raising one of the folded leaves of meat to his mouth.

That he even uses the chopsticks is something of a surprise. Hannibal wouldn't have been surprised if a creature such as him eschewed unfamiliar human tools, preferring to eat by other means, but he appreciates the tact nonetheless. Hannibal watches the sliver of meat disappear between Will's lips, rapt. It does something to Hannibal to watch Will eat something he has caught and made, a warm vicious sense of pride flowing through him, heady and satisfied.

Will chews, swallows, and hums, making a noise of agreement, finally then stepping back to allow Hannibal to pull out his chair for him, Hannibal then circling to take his own across the table. When he takes his seat, he finds those storm grey eyes watching him, curious. "And what did this man do to earn a place on your table?"

"He took something from you," Hannibal says, as he assembles his own mouthful, folding a delicate slice of meat within a shiso leaf and dipping it into the soy sauce. He nods back towards the body inside the kitchen. "His name is Hernand Madrigues, more commonly known as El Pescador by those in the trade for rare and illegal delicacies. Until recently he was the only supplier of Vaquita meat, though of course the trade dried up when the species

went extinct two years ago. His poaching is thought to have contributed directly to their extinguishing."

Will hums at that, glancing the meat a new look, considering, picking up a slice of tongue and dipping it in sauce. "Do you call it cooking if it's raw?"

"Heat is only one aspect of cooking," Hannibal says, voice warm. This is a topic on which he could talk for hours, and to have Will pose him an actual question warms him. "Sourcing the ingredients, equipment, preparation, storage, seasoning... it all plays its part. One could argue that sashimi is one of the simplest meals in the world, and yet few ever learn the skill of drawing out the full flavour of the meat using the cut alone."

Will takes another bite, bringing a folded leaf with shiso to his lips, red with hidden meat. "I like it."

"I hoped you would," Hannibal says, pleased. He takes a sip of his wine, savouring the rich bite of it, before carefully setting the glass aside again, eyes on Will. "And so?" Hannibal asks, voice light and easy, a smile on the corner of his lips, only a little teasing. "Are my sins forgiven?"

"Forgiveness requires repentance," Will says, sending him a look, not taken in for a moment. There's something amused in his tone. "I don't think you've ever regretted a single thing in your life."

"Absolution then," Hannibal replies, throwing the volley back. The twist of his lips is properly amused now, not trying to hide his taunting. "Can I expect to survive the night? Or will it be me next gracing your table, feeding your children?"

Will lets out a breath, leaning back in his chair, his eyes narrow and amused as he looks at Hannibal. His smile is a dark. He swirls his wine in hand. "I suppose that depends."

"On what?"

"On what boon you ask for this time," Will replies, raising his glass to his lips to take a slow sip, his eyes now leaving Hannibal's, that icy grey turned dark and amused. Of this, apparently, he has no doubt, reading Hannibal too well.

Hannibal sits back in his chair in turn, an echo of Will as he takes up his own wine, regarding Will across the table even as Will regards him. They both know he will ask for something, the question is merely what. Hannibal's intentions have been clear, and Will knows he seeks to have more of his time, more of *him.* The question is merely how Hannibal will make his request.

Asking for a kiss would be all too easy, and as much as the thought tempts him, Hannibal knows he would not survive Will indulging him it, at least not tonight. No, boldness becomes recklessness at a certain point, and Hannibal is not reckless.

"Dine with me again," Hannibal says instead, setting down his wine glass lightly, dark eyes meeting Will's across the table. "Allow me to give you another gift."

For a moment there is nothing but silence, those grey eyes studying him, but finally Will huffs and looks away, and Hannibal knows he has him. "Fine," Will replies, his agreement curt, though Hannibal knows the tone is added on as an afterthought, more out of a desire to not see Hannibal get too smug than anything else. Will's eyes cut back to him, sharp, warning. "But don't think this means anything. You'll win no gifts from my favour - greater men than you have tried and not liked the result. Your body will rot like any other, in my waters."

"We shall see," Hannibal replies, earning a snort from Will from turn, who sends him a wary sideways look. Hannibal merely nods to the spread, lifting his own chopsticks once more. "Please, eat your fill. There's plenty more to get through."

-

Hannibal gets back to Baltimore in time to have a few weeks left of his sabbatical. Ordinarily that wouldn't be enough to put together a few papers for publication, but he has a store of writing that would serve nicely, just in need of polishing up. He spends those weeks working, creating something substantial enough to justify his time away, and when not at his desk spends his time in thought instead in his kitchen, considering what to make for his next offering.

For their first dinner together, Hannibal had made his meal in accordance to the tenants of the sea - raw food, created in a tradition that dates back hundreds of years, fish served that way for as long as fish have ever been served. It had gone down well, Will neither eschewing the meat itself nor the other ingredients that went with it. Trying to figure out what to feed a god is an odd thing, but at the very least Will shows no disdain for eating traditional human foods - he'd eaten with the chopsticks, after all, which shows at least some passing knowledge of human culinary culture.

No, Hannibal expects that Will would indeed be happy to eat whatever Hannibal might choose to serve him, so long as the dish itself is of high enough quality to tempt him.

It is that thought that occupies his mind, as he tries to decide what would be suitable. It's a matter of balances, of scales, Hannibal decides. His first interest is in not boring Will, and so while the last dish had gone done well, it would not do to repeat it again. No, it must be something new, something novel, something different than what has come before. He served Will food at its most simple, it's most primitive - raw meat and bitter greens, grated ginger and salt - and now he will swing to the other end of the scale, creating something exquisite, something complex and fine, a culinary masterwork too delicate and rare for even the table of the best Michelin restaurant.

He has shown Will what he can do with only a knife and a cut of meat, now let him see what Hannibal's kitchen is truly capable of.

-

The hospital, of course, is pleased with the papers he publishes - three of them, all accepted with only minor revisions by the reviewers - and Hannibal's colleagues are pleased in turn by the return of another body to the rotation in the emergency room. He slips back into his role

as if he has never left, earning a few cheerful comments that he seems well rested after his sabbatical, and that is that.

He spends three weeks, the better part of a month, planning the meal, looking through his codex of recipes back and forth, considering one assemblage after another. A dozen ideas catch his eye, only to be dismissed, and in that time he considers what gift he might give. Last time, the dinner had been the gift itself - the offering of the thief that had stolen one of Will's children, tracked down and filleted on his behalf, made to suffer every second as he died, the process slow and drawn out, Hannibal doing nothing to mute or abate his pain.

This time, there is not the same message. One supposes the dinner itself might be enough, but the thought feels lacking to Hannibal. Of course, the question then becomes what the gift itself will be, and that is its own corundum. No trite thing will do, and what, after all, can Hannibal offer to a god?

Evenings, Hannibal spends mulling over the concept, the faint strains of music playing through the house as he works in the kitchen. The thought follows him through his shifts at work, tracks him as he hunts and butcher's his prey, even slips into the solace of his bed as he lies between the sheets, waiting for sleep to take him.

Impress me, Will had said, the whisper his voice clear and bright in Hannibal's ear. And he had, with that last dinner, but this will be something new. Each gift Hannibal has given so far has offered a different part of himself - blood shed for Will's sake, the willing forsaking of the lives of the (near) innocent for no purpose but Will's pleasure, to hunt and destroy his enemies, those who have murdered his children. He's given him food created by his hand, music composed by his own fingers, the images of Hannibal's own mind, Will's own person reflected through Hannibal's eyes and laid on paper. Components of every part of him, offered up one by one, together painting a picture of a whole.

What else is left?

Hannibal stills, pausing in the midst of pouring himself a glass of wine, his kitchen now still and empty, dinner finished and the dishes now cleaned and put away. He steps out of the kitchen, making his way up to the silent, socked feet silent on the floors, the light in the hall casting a slanting pane of light into the room as he steps in, walking along the line of bookshelves until his eyes land on the correct title. His fingers hesitate as he moves to pull it down, lingering just above the worn fabric, turned thin with age and handling.

He pulls the book down anyway, fingers curling around its familiar corners. *Aš esu tavo nelaimė,* the title reads, *I am your misfortune.* A folk tale he'd used to read in his youth - that his parents used to read to him in his youth, one of the few surviving relics to be brought with him to the New World. He flips it open gently, worn pages brittle between his fingers, scent long stained by dust, and finds what he's looking for nearly halfway through the book, his fingers slowly stilling as they brush folded paper hidden within.

Maybe... Maybe this will do.

The night Hannibal chooses for his next dinner is that of the full moon. The happy coincidence of a weekend with the moon's coming gives Hannibal leave to head for his chosen destination. He doesn't go as far as Canada this time, nor to Mexico or Japan, instead sticking closer to home. The West Coast has plenty of beautiful spots to offer, many of them isolated enough to suit Hannibal's needs. A few hours drive furnishes him with a house perched above the sea, standing over a cliff overlooking the cold winter waters of the North Atlantic.

Hannibal collects his ingredients carefully, packing them lovingly for the drive, and when he arrives spends the first day of his weekend antiquating himself with the facilities of the house and it's kitchen. With his shift, he's not due back until Tuesday, and it leaves him the Lord's Day, Sunday, when the moon is highest and brightest in the sky, to put together his feast. It feels fitting, creating a profane offering for a primal god on the day the rest of the nation retreat to church and go to their knees for their god - more fitting, even, to do it on the night of the full moon, the great celestial body whose presence holds such sway over Will's medium, its eerie light echoed in the pale glow of his eyes in moment's of fury.

Hannibal has a long habit of creating feasts, but he outdoes himself that Sunday, beginning his work early in the morning and working throughout the day. Seven courses, each more delicate than the last, recipes designed and modified by Hannibal's own hand. He works this time with a combination of meat and fish, laying together the best of what the land and sea have to offer, not shying from the offering of Will's own creatures - the ocean is cruel, an ecosystem like any other, subsisting on an endless cycle of violence and predation. Braised meat, baked in claw with marrow and laid with apples on the side, tender and succulent and harvested fresh from the thigh of Hannibal's latest victim; truite saumonée au bleu, trout poached and served on a bed of tender vegetables, pale scales gleaming amongst the carefully arranged coils of octopus threaded through them; oysters and sea urchin, cracked open, baring their glistening insides to the light where they sit amongst beds of flowers; fine sweetbreads, delicate cuts of the thymus and pancreas served in the Turkish style, with accompanying bread, spiced and succulent.

Never has he had the occasion to create such a feast when cooking only for a single guest, and Hannibal finds himself retreating into the joy of it, the simple pleasure of being at work in the kitchen and watching fine things come together between his hands. Out on the deck, the table has already been set, Hannibal bringing this time the finest of his own home collection - his favoured and most well thought of pieces. His arrangement last time had spoken of Will, created in a reflection of his tastes, in his honour, and this time Hannibal lets the mirror reflect on himself instead, letting it say what it will of his tastes and pleasures.

It is typical for Hannibal to host his dinners late, and this time he sets it even later, waiting until the night is well and truly dark and the moon is bright and high in the sky before finally reaching down to let the gas burners of the stove click off, setting aside the last ready plate. Candles have been lit, a scattered handful across the table bathing the bone and flower arrangements in soft, flickering light, though in truth the light of the moon is more than enough to see by.

Hannibal lays the last plate out, then steps back into the house, slipping the apron off and draping it carefully on the back of one of the high counter stools. He rolls down his sleeves,

smoothing out any wrinkles, and fixes his cuff-links back into place - a subtle glint of soft silver - only then turning and shrugging his suit jacket back on. His shirt is a deep rich burgundy, his suit chosen in black to accent it, complete with vest and the neat fold of a pocket square, beautiful silk patterned in porcelain white and inky blue.

A single glance in the mirror - everything neat, everything put together, Hannibal at the finest he can be - and Hannibal turns, stepping back onto the deck. He circles the table, fingers finding tiny details and righting them, straightening a fork just so, casting an eye over the flowers to ensure they fall just right, finally coming to a stop behind his chair, his hand coming to rest on its back, the seat across from it still empty and waiting.

Nothing in the air has changed, but Hannibal can almost feel it, the looming potential. His eyes slip shut, listening to the distant crashing off the waves against the rocks below. *Will,* he thinks soft, and doesn't not even have to put the word to voice before he feels a shift in the air behind him, the arrival of a presence.

Hannibal's eyes open, and he turns. His breath almost catches at what he finds. Last time, Will had appeared at his table in a human guise, wearing clothes as humble as any other man - a fisherman, Hannibal had thought him, and been charmed by the look, rustic and well worn. The Will that stands before him now, leaning there against the rail of the deck, is a different beast. Gone is the comfortable flannel and worn denim, in its place a suit, sleek and sharp and black, a match to Hannibal's own. His hair is short, curling dark around his head, eyes a clear and cutting grey, stubble fine and short, the sight of him enough to make Hannibal's stomach lurch, the weightless feeling of a step missed, a flutter in his chest.

Will's eyes narrow, and he makes a cold, amused noise, pushing off the rail and gliding forward, movements smooth. "Careful," he says, as he rounds the table, coming to stand behind the chair opposite Hannibal's own. "Stare like that and you might reveal too much."

"Apologies," Hannibal says, lips quirking as he inclines his head. "You've simply caught me by surprise. I wasn't expecting you to dress up."

That earns a snort, Will pulling out his chair and taking a seat, eyes narrowing at Hannibal as he steps over, lifting the decanter and filling Will's glass. "I'm not a savage. I know what tradition dictates for a meal of this many courses."

Hannibal smiles at that, stepping back and filling his own glass. "And yet I remain flattered. I would have accepted you at my table no matter how you chose to appear. That you'd put in the effort honours me."

Will makes an unimpressed noise at that, turning them to glance over the table, surveying the delights Hannibal has put together for him, his eyes settling with unerring accuracy on the urchin, insides cracked open and still laying inside their shells. In the candlelight, the soft organ meat glistens a beautiful brilliant orange. "Raw," Will notes, voice amused, stormy eyes flicking to Hannibal. "One would think it daring, killing my own children and offering them to me at your table."

"All life is a process of death," Hannibal replies, beginning to carefully serve, arranging each of their plates with delicate portions of each dish. "If you love all of your children, do you

resent them when they consume one another? Maybe it comes down to choosing favourites - allowing yourself to love only some, so that you might forgive them for the violence they enact upon the rest. If my guess is correct, even that is perhaps too sentimental."

Will's eyes narrow at him, but he lets out a breath, leaning back in his chair, amused. He has a a fork already in hand, turning it between his fingers, and when Hannibal steps back, moving to take his own seat, Will spears a slender slice of fish, raising it into the air so that he might study it, pale flesh buttery soft and perfectly cooked. "No," he says, turning it in the light. "I'm not that sentimental," he says, and brings it to his mouth, the morsel disappearing between his lips.

"The apathy of a god," Hannibal replies, his own voice low and amused, basking in the satisfaction that comes with watching Will eat something he has created, accepting his offerings once again. "So even in this, you are fickle. Perhaps I should pity your poor children."

Will just shoots him a dry look, saying exactly what he thinks of that, and Hannibal's eyes meet his, amused, conceding, as he inclines his head and takes up his own fork. The gentle scrape of metal on porcelain, and Hannibal raises his own piece to his mouth, a fine cut of meat glistening with a thin dark sauce. The flavour spills over his tongue, tart and rich, the meat parting tender at the touch of his teeth. He doesn't make a noise, nothing so gauche, but his eyes slip shut for a moment, savouring the taste, lingering on it for a moment and letting it play across his pallet before he swallows.

He feels Will's eyes on him and when he opens his eyes he finds him watching him, icy grey eyes set on him from across the table. "So," Will says. "You have us here again, at your table. I suppose you consider this quite a victory, being able to summon me back again and again - like a dog to heel."

There's a note of scorn in his voice, warning, and it leaves Hannibal amused. "Not at all," he replies, spearing another delicate piece of meat on the tines of his fork. "Does a tree consider it a victory, watching the sun rise in the sky, blessed with the glance to bask in the greatness of its presence? You come of your own accord - I'm merely lucky enough to be here to witness it."

That earns a huff, Will's eyes narrowing at him. He takes a sip of his wine - pale, a dry white to pair with the fish - regarding Hannibal over the top of the table spread. For all this reaction, Hannibal knows he's amused him.

"You're an odd creature, you know," Will says finally, icy eyes settled on Hannibal, the weight of his gaze a pressure that Hannibal can feel on his shoulder. Being beneath Will's gaze feels like being the only creature alive in the world, like standing there at the crest of the endless horizon and feeling the eye of the moon turn to gaze upon him, the weight of his attention too great for any human mind to truly bear.

"I shall take that as a compliment," Hannibal replies, a pleased smile on his lips. To be named singular by a creature like Will - it is perhaps the greatest compliment Hannibal could receive, and it warms his chest. He does not pretend he exists on Will's level, but to be

permitted this, to sit across from him, to watch Will eat food created by his own hand, a guest at Hannibal's table... Yes, that's an honour indeed.

"Please," Hannibal says, nodding towards their plates. "Eat. The dishes will be at their best fresh."

Dinner passes quietly after that, Hannibal feeling no need to tease any further conversation out of the silence. Will eats, and Hannibal watches him in between bites of his own food, just the act of watching Will eat a satisfaction in its own right, watching his reaction to each new dish. His face says little, but Hannibal can read his pleasure all the same in the way his plate empties, in the way he pauses for a moment and distinctly doesn't refuse when Hannibal rises to serve another portion, watching the order in which Will returns to his food - the rawest and freshest of the sea fare first, the oysters and urchin, and then the cooked fish, meat after that and finally vegetables. He supposes he shouldn't be surprised that Will favours the fruits of the sea - he is of the ocean after all, and he shares its hungers, for all that he might name its creatures his children.

More wine is poured, dessert brought out, and then finally that is done and gone as well. Hannibal returns their empty plates to the kitchen and when he steps back out onto the deck he finds Will leaning there against the rail, elbows braced on the dark wood as he looks out over the water. The moonlight turns the waves silver, light glimmering across their surface, wispy clouds glowing with it's soft pale touch, and Hannibal has to pause there at the door for a moment to just admire the beauty of the sight - Will standing there in the moonlight, cast in gentle panes of shadow, as much a beauty as he had been in the first moment Hannibal saw him. More, even, for the fact that Hannibal knows him now, knows what he is, the blessing he is being practised with, being privileged to stand here and take in the sight of him.

Quiet footsteps carry Hannibal across the deck, joining Will at the rail. "'Though there be fury on the waves, beneath them there is none,'" Hannibal says, voice carrying quiet in the night, his own eyes turning over the waters. "Truly," he adds, wry. "Nathaniel Hawthorne was correct. 'The ocean solitudes are blest.'"

Will turns his eyes to him then, making a low noise, amused, weaving his fingers together where his hands hand over the rail. "And so now you give me poetry. Is this your gift for today, then?"

"No," Hannibal replies, amused. "It's not." He supposes he shouldn't be surprised that Will reads him well enough to know that the dinner itself was not it. A gift, yes, perhaps, and made in Will's honour, but not what Hannibal brought him here tonight to offer. Not poetry either, for all that it might be suiting. Hannibal's hand dips into his pocket, hesitating there as his fingertips brush worn, folded paper.

It's not a gift suitable for a god, perhaps, but it's what Hannibal has to offer.

The colours of origami flower are faded, its corners left softened and strained by time. It was a lopsided at the time of its creation, made from paper that was cut ever so slightly unevenly, plain and humble, and the long years of its life have only left it humbler still. Still, he cups it in his hand, a delicate, precious thing, and holds it out.

"It's your's, if you would have it," Hannibal says, as Will turns, taking it in. So many gifts, Hannibal has offered Will now - sacrifices made in his name, split blood and sculpted bodies, feasts created by Hannibal's own hand, music and art and his own blood, spilling through the water, drawn by Will's claws. Everything Hannibal is and has been - or almost. His present, his future, and here now, to complete it, his past.

The flower is not a beautiful, made by fingers that had been too clumsy, kept hidden between the folds of a book, protected and sheltered from the word. More than thirty years ago, Hannibal had watched Mischa's small hands fold it, had watched her eyes brighten and her smile dimple as she turned to offer it to him, a gift to her brother. It's the last physical thing he has left of her, the sole memento he had permitted himself to go back for and collect, which he has carried with him from country to country since.

"I had a sister once," Hannibal says, voice quiet, the silence of the night drawing, close and tender, until it feels like the two of them stand alone in all the world, the only two voices to exist. "Six years younger than me. She was, I think, the closest thing to my own child I will ever have - and I loved her as if she were my own. She made this for me, shortly before she died. I've never shown it to another soul."

"She was taken violently," Will notes, his voice soft, eyes set on the flower. His voice isn't pitying, nothing so sickly and sympathetic as that, just- Soft. Quiet.

"She was," Hannibal confirms. "I would say that it was the precipitating incident in creating what I am today, but in truth, I think I would have always been this monstrous." No doubt any psychologist in the world would look at him and argue the influence of trauma in shaping his particular proclivities, but Hannibal knows better. Some monsters are not made, but merely born. Mischa's presence in his life might have extended his innocence, but it was always one day going to fade, the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis to take on its true form.

Will's eyes are still fixed on the flower, gaze soft, and he steps closer, one hand rising to cup Hannibal's own, skin cool where it brushes Hannibal's. Will's thumb brushes one of the worn petals, eyes closing. "An offering from the heart, received and then given," Will says. "It carries heavy memories."

It hurts Hannibal to part with it, but it feels right. A true and final proof of his sincerity, of what he offers will - not merely components of himself but a wholeness, all of Hannibal, if Will will take him. He could not bear to see the flower in any other person's hands.

Will's eyes shine softly now, lit with moonglow, turning pale one more, and in Hannibal's hand the flower begins to shine softly too, motes of pale silver light rising around it, ancient faded paper becoming a holy thing. Will's fingers slide against Hannibal's, and Hannibal draws in a small breath when instead of taking it, Will folds Hannibal's fingers gently around it, raising Hannibal's hand so that Will might press a soft kiss to the inside of his wrist.

"Keep it for me," Will says, eyes rising then to meet Hannibal's, breath soft against Hannibal's skin. The inside of his wrist burns softly where Will's lips had touched, a pale mark lingering there, right above the trailing ridge of one of the scars Will had left. "It'll do better in your hands than my own."

Hannibal's breath catches in his chest. "Then...?"

Will nods, hand falling away from Hannibal's as he takes a step back, right to the edge of the deck. "Your suit is accepted," Will says, those glowing, moon-pale eyes meeting Hannibal's, bright and inhuman. Behind him, the air has begun to shift, the clouds gathering, the waves beginning to rise, all the sea surging. Will meets his eyes, gaze fierce, expression serious. "This is your only chance to change your mind, Hannibal. My kind is possessive. Once given, I will not let you go again."

"I expected nothing less," Hannibal says, and steps closer. He takes Will's hand in his, raising it so that he can press a final kiss to his knuckles, meeting his eyes. "Haven't I made it clear? Everything I am is yours."

Will's eyes narrow, the dangerous flash of a smile on his lips, and then an arm is tightening around Hannibal's waist and they're plunging, Will pulling him through the rail as if its nothing more than air. Hannibal has a split second to tense, the wind howling, Will's arm sliding tighter around him, the bright glow of his pale eyes all that Hannibal can see, and then they're in the water, crashing beneath the depths, ice cold water rushing in, the cold shock of it biting Hannibal's skin, Hannibal's lungs giving a sudden, instinctive, painful seize, gasping for air.

When he opens his eyes, Will is all around him, a swirling mass of darkness, all glistening scales and shadowy fins, vast and infinite, pale eyes glowing in the dark water. His hands are gentle on Hannibal as he drags him deeper, enveloping him so completely that Hannibal can no longer tell which way is up or down, until the only thing he sees is Will - trailing, silk thin membranes and sliding coils, glowing pulses of pale abyssal light, just *Will, Will, Will,* magnificent and dangerous and monstrous.

He's as human as he was when Hannibal first saw him, fine suit and human manners melted away. Human enough, pale and beautiful, hands reaching up to cup Hannibal's jaw, gentle, taking his face between his hands, tilting his head up, and then it doesn't matter that Hannibal's lungs are burning, that he's drowning, because Will's lips are on his. It's possessive, fierce, cool skin meeting his, a dichotomous of fire and ice, human warmth and inhuman cool, a tongue sliding into Hannibal's mouth, Hannibal's lungs filling with water, saved from death by the very creature drowning him, killed and brought to life by Will's kiss.

Everything is Will - hands on Hannibal's skin, his mouth to his, immense scaled body twining around Hannibal, curling in, butterfly-soft membranes and gentle spines brushing against Hannibal's legs, his back, their touch burning cool, every point of contacted marked with godly blessing.

Hannibal is drowning, is dying, is being resurrected, and he winds his fingers through Will's hair and leans in, kissing him back deeply. He hears Will's voice echo in his ears, a murmur that hums outwards through the ocean, reverberating through Hannibal's bones. *The breath from your lungs, given by my own, so that the oceans bear me know you as my own.*

A forehead presses cool against Hannibal's own, Will's thumbs stroking along the line of Hannibal's cheeks, below his eyes. Will's eyes glow, so bright now, pitiless, the moon reflected in his gaze, and Hannibal gasps, bubbles rising in a torrent as the light burns, Will

pulling him closer, kissing him deeper. *The light from your eyes, given by my own, so that the skies that witness you know the new truth of you.*

Hannibal's hands claw at Will's back, clutching him tight, Will's mouth leaving his as he bites a kiss against Hannibal's throat, mouth finding his again in a brutal kiss, as one of his hands slides down, claws tracing floating fabric, until they rest above Hannibal's heart. A single sharp thrust, and the water clouds red, Hannibal arching. *The beating of your heart, stilled, made to beat with my own, so that the earth that created you knows you are its no longer.*

Oh Hannibal, Will's voice whispers in his ear, so soft, vicious, and amused, as soft fingers card through Hannibal's hair, claws replaced now with human fingers, still stained with Hannibal's blood, holding him tenderly. *You're mine now. No mortal wound will harm you, no age wither you, death will never take you - you will never be able to escape.*

Lips meet his, the dark swallowing him, and Hannibal's last thought is *Good.*

-

Alana pulls up to a stop before the house slowly, casting a careful eye out before her. She'd paused three times to double check on the drive out, consulting with her GPS, and is relieved when the number of cars outside suggest that she's got the right address. The house is fine, large and beautiful, in a modern style that's all open windows and rich dark wood, it's wide drive already well full of cars that were just as expensive.

The usual crowd of attendees at Hannibal's soiree's have been abuzz for weeks since his last invitation went out, and in truth Alana can't fault them their curiosity - she certainly can't fault their own. Hannibal's been holding his feasts for years, Alana an attendant at more than a fair few of them, but rarely in all the time Alana has known him has he held one anywhere but at his residence in Baltimore. Learning that he has a second house where he spends most of his weekends hadn't been much of a surprise - many as wealthy as Hannibal do - but learning that its a fancy modern thing right on the edge of the sea had been.

Hannibal just never seemed like much of a beach-goer, but Alana supposes everyone has hidden depths. Alana's known him for the better part of six years now, since she finished her own studies at John Hopkins, where he'd served as her mentor. Even after beginning her own practice, the two of them had kept in touch. Alana hadn't even known that Hannibal was seeing someone, let alone that there was a spouse - a *husband* - somewhere there on the side. Hannibal was private, private enough that it had taken years of knowing him for Alana to realise he was even married.

The drive is nearly an hour and twenty minutes out of Baltimore, and Alana might think it was rude, asking all his guests to drive out so far, but in truth the mystery of the whole thing is enough to have every single attendee nearly frothing at the mouth with anticipation.

"That's a change," Alana had said, noting the address with bemusement when Hannibal had stopped by her office to give her the invitation.

"It is," Hannibal had agreed, inclining his head. "Hopefully a nice change, however. There is something to be said for the effect of new scenery, the way it can expand experiences and embolden us to new tastes. And," Hannibal had added, wry. "Will prefers the sea."

"So we're finally getting to meet the mystery man," Alana had said, smiling. Hannibal's husband is the great mystery to everyone who knows him, the white whale who's absence goes felt at every dinner party he holds, teasing every guest who comes, turning to Hannibal and asking when they'll finally get a glimpse of him. He's somewhat shy, had been Hannibal's fond explanation, adding with more amusement when it was just he and Alana alone that Will rarely had the patience to tolerate large crowds.

"He likes his solitude, and I like him happy," Hannibal had said, something true and warm in his eyes when he spoke, smile soft. He had the eyes of a man gently, softly, hopelessly in love, and it left Alana both warmed and ever so slightly envious. There'd been a time when she had perhaps thought... But well, Hannibal and his husband are clearly deeply happy together, and Alana is happy for them.

"You must have done some serious bribing, to get him to agree to come," Alana had said, and Hannibal had made a low noise, wry and amused, meeting her gaze with a look that said, yes, no decent amount of bribery had indeed been done.

Finding a spot, Alana slides her car in. The cool night air spills across her skin as she steps out, pausing only to collect her coat and her keys. Any other time, she might bring a bottle of wine, something, a gift for her host, but after the first few times joining Hannibal for dinner he'd trained her out of the habit. *Come bringing only yourself,* and with anyone else it would be a polite line better ignored but not with Hannibal. He really does actually mean it.

The mingling has already begun, a late patient keeping Alana just long enough to miss the beginning of the party. Light shines out through the windows, soft music and the hum of conversation, and she folds her coat over her arm as she walks up the stairs. A last glance over herself - no stains on her dress, no wrinkles, no flyaway hairs, all things neat and in order - and Alana rings the doorbell.

She's left waiting two seconds, three, and then the door is opening and Hannibal is there, the lines around his eyes creasing minutely as he smiles and invites her in. "Alana," he says, taking her coat as she steps in. "Just on time."

"Fashionably late," Alana replies, sharing an amused look, and Hannibal nods, lifting her coat to hand with the rest. His suit jacket has been abandoned somewhere, sleeves rolled up, still wearing an apron - halfway through cooking, it seems, leaving his guests to amuse themselves with the entrees while he directs the small army of waiters and handles the last of the cooking himself.

"I'm afraid I must abandon you," Hannibal says apologetically. "The first course will be ready in another half hour. But first-" Hannibal steps through into the kitchen for a moment, disappearing through the door, and returns with a glass in hand, a dark beer, which shines a

deep amber beneath the light. He holds it out in offering. "For you. I've been experimenting with some new brews, and so I set one side for you."

Alana smiles, accepting it, and nods her head. "This more than makes up for any apology," she says. Hannibal's beer is always something to behold, and there's something to be said for the joy of a friend making something just for you. "Let this keep me company, you get back to your cooking. I'm not afraid to mingle."

One last smile, and Hannibal disappears back into the kitchen, moving with the smooth stride of a king entering his domain. Alana turns, making for the other door across the hall, stepping out into the main lounge, the music and bustle of conversation washing over her, the rest of the guests already well in attendance. A few familiar faces turn, moving to greet her, and Alana lets herself get lost in the course of it.

The beer is good, the little appetisers circling around the room even better, and Alana easily gets caught up in conversation. Half an hour is no time at all, with so many different people looking to catch up, and Hannibal's self imposed deadline is almost up by the time a murmur in the room announces a new arrival. It catches Alana's attention, a group of people a conversation over pausing, letting out a small fluttering of excitement and craning their heads.

"It seems the infamous husband has arrived. Seems he's even later than you," Mrs Komeda notes dryly, and Alana makes a low noise, unable to help the way she herself turns to look. True enough, there, stepping through the door is a sharply dressed man in a suit. Dark curls, stubble, sharp grey eyes - he looks over the room, casting a glance over the crowd, and turns, snapping a champagne off a passing tray and directly making for the far corner of the room, not stopping along the way to talk to a single person as he makes for the wide windows and takes a perch there, leaning against the glass as he sips at his drink.

"Oh my, he is a character, isn't he?" Mrs Komeda says, her voice amused. "The brooding hero of some tragic mystery, wouldn't you say? And those cheekbones. I can see why Hannibal likes him."

Alana hums, sending Mrs Komeda an amused look, politely turning her eyes away from the man - Will, it must be Will - before her glance can turn into rude staring. "Hannibal did say he was something of a solitary creature."

"By which you mean he's smart enough to want to avoid the zoo out here," Mrs Komeda says with a snort, sipping at her drink. It's wine, red, Mrs Komeda unwilling to ever drink anything else. She's one of Hannibal's oldest friends, though, and has been attending his parties since long before Hannibal even made the change from surgery to psychiatry - if someone is entitled to some eccentricities, it's her, and Hannibal seems perfectly willing to accommodate them.

They don't get much longer to stare after that. Hannibal calls dinner shortly, all of the guests filtering through into the dining room to take up their seats along the long table. Hannibal has outdone himself again, eschewing red meats and game in favour of the fruits of the sea. Seafood, apparently, is the name of the night, the table bursting with a bountiful array,

complete with beds of seasoned perfumed rice, finely sliced fresh vegetables, and rich beautiful sauces, all laid out with Hannibal's typical flair.

No sooner have the guests seated themselves do the first plates begin making their way out, Hannibal carrying the first himself. The chair at the head of the table is empty, still waiting for its master, and at its left sits the dark haired man from earlier - Will then, definitely, Hannibal would put no one else there with his husband in attendance. Alana herself is seated a few seats down.

The first plate Hannibal brings down, he sets before Will, laying the plate before him and pausing here, murmuring something in his ear. It earns an unimpressed look in return, Will muttering something back and rolling his eyes. When Hannibal straightens he's smiling though, expression utterly smitten. Alana isn't the only one watching, rapt and curious, the spell only broken when the first of the waiters come out to begin handing out the rest of the plates.

The meal itself begins when Hannibal is seated, every member of the table finally joined, conversation picking up as wine glasses are once more filled and the soft clink of cutlery on porcelain filling the air. A face Alana vaguely remembers is sitting to her right, a Dr Amarin, an anesthesiologist if Alana remembers correctly. They'd talked at a previous party of Hannibal's and the conversation is easy to pick back up, proving an interesting distraction - the reason, she suspects, that they'd been seated together, Hannibal never one to miss a detail.

A course passes, and then two, Alana sipping at her wine in moderation as she makes her way through her food. Dr Amarin eventually turns to talk to the guest on his own right about halfway through the dinner, and Alana finds herself tuning back into the conversation at the head of the table. So far it's been Hannibal directly all conversation up there, Will not saying a word, but someone seems to have finally gathered the courage to try and break his silence.

"So, Will - if I might call you Will, why, I feel like we're friends already - what is it you do?" they ask - Kathleen Rubre, if Alana is putting the right name to the right face, one of Hannibal's opera acquaintances. "Hannibal tells us so little about you, we're all dying to hear more."

Will glances at her, expression bored, the look in his eyes both sharp and deeply indifferent. "Hm, he's ashamed of me, I suppose. Wants to keep me a dirty secret."

That earns a choked, nervous sort of laugh, Kathleen waving one hand, seeming to nervously teeter on whether its a joke and whether she should be laughing. She makes an attempt at it anyway. "Oh, surely not! A man as charming as you! So," she says, rallying almost admirably. "Are you in the medical profession like Hannibal...?"

A curt noise, Will's eyes flitting to Kathleen for a second. "I study carcasses," he says, voice flat, and Kathleen seems so thrown off guard, reeling at the unexpected response, that Alana can't help the quiet way she turns away to cough, quickly raising her glass to take a sip to her smile, on the verge of laughing.

"Oh. *Oh,"* Kathleen says awkwardly, trying to find a way to recover. "That's... nice?"

Will lets out a hum, finally seeming to have mercy. "I'm a marine scientist. Whale-fall scavenging succession is my area of speciality - not that you'd care." It's said so carelessly, with such utter apathy, as if he truly really does know that Kathleen doesn't care and doesn't give a shit that she doesn't, that Kathleen actually blinks, mouth opening blankly, caught out. Alana can't help the way she glances towards Hannibal, dreading his reaction at seeing someone act so rudely at his table. Hannibal has always been a bastion of good manners, abhorring nothing more than ill courtesy, and yet when Alana glances his way, she finds him watching Will with a smile, his expression utterly smitten.

Kathleen doesn't seem to know what to do after that, the silence sinking like a stone, Will seeming entirely happy to just let it happen. Hannibal finally has mercy, sending Will one last besotted look before redirecting the conversation. "We met while I was on sabbatical during my time at John Hopkins. Will was doing research in Canada and I was making the most of the solitude to get some writing done - by chance, we ran into each other. It was love at first sight."

"For you," Will says, taking a sip of his wine, expression still flat, and maybe Alana is starting to get a sense for the way they work now, because she isn't terribly surprised when Hannibal just turns to him with a soft look.

"For me," he agrees, threading his fingers through Will's and raising his hand so that he can press a kiss to Will's wrist, soft and adoring. In that moment his eyes are just for Will. And then he smiles, wry, turning back to the rest of the conversation. "Will, of course, took more convincing. A proper courting."

"Music and poetry and all, though he stopped that shortly, thank god," Will adds drily, which earns a few titters. The conversation moves on after that, Hannibal redirecting them to other topics, Will sinking back into silence. No one else tries to tease him back into conversation, which apparently seems to have been his aim, because he sits there in silence the rest of the dinner, seemingly content to let Hannibal handle all the talking for the two of them.

Dinner breaks, eventually, dessert coming and going and the guests retiring back through into the lounge and foyer to begin sobering themselves back up with some coffee in preparation for the drive back. It's there that Alana finally gets the chance to talk to Will herself. Hannibal's mingling with the court, stepping back effortlessly into his role of host, and Will's made his way back to that corner by the window, another glass of champagne in hand, forgoing the coffee being offered to everyone else.

He's made his preference for solitude clear enough, but Alana dares to venture her way over anyway.

"You seem to be seeking shelter from the storm. I hope you don't mind if I join you for a moment," Alana says, joining him there, giving a soft smile. "I don't think we've had the chance to be introduced - I'm Alana Bloom. I work in psychiatry with Hannibal, a colleague of his, I suppose, though in truth initially he was my mentor."

Will turns to her, grey eyes meeting hers, and something interesting happens - his gaze actually softens a little. Not a lot, but it's less frigid than it had been when talking with

Kathleen. "Will," he replies, though he doesn't raise a hand for a handshake. "Hannibal's told me about you. You're one of the ones he actually likes."

Again, his tone almost catches Alana by surprise. He's blunt, so much so that it teeters on the verge of outright rude, but there's a charm to it as well - an honesty, one might say, his curtness like a breath of fresh air. It's a little liberating, honestly.

"I'm glad to hear it," Alana replies, her smile true, stepping closer to join him properly at the window, now that she knows her arrival isn't unwelcome. "I'm surprised we haven't met before. Hannibal seems smitten - I'm surprised he isn't dragging you out at every opportunity to show you off."

"He could try," Will replies, scowling, making it clear just what he thinks of this idea. Shy had been the tactful way of putting it, Alana supposes, when the alternative is the simple truth that Will seems to find nearly every person here vapid and boring and finds the thought of swallowing a bowl full of tacks more agreeable than having to spend five minutes talking to any of them. Which. Well. Alana can't say she truly disagrees. High brow schmoozing does have its time and place, and Alana really does enjoy some of the conversations that come from it, but its clear Will isn't the same

The fact he's even here, then, speaks of his fondness for Hannibal - or perhaps simply just the scale of the bribe Hannibal had offered.

"Well, whatever the reason, I'm glad for the chance to finally meet you," Alana says. "Especially if this really is the only time you let him cajole you into showing up at one of his parties."

The conversation doesn't get much further than that, a soft call from over Alana's shoulder interrupting them. Mrs Komeda is making her way over, husband on her arm. They introduce themselves to Will, a few others slipping over to join the conversation, and Alana finds herself standing in the midst of it all. Every question directed Will's way gets a curt hum in return, a one word answer bitten out if they're lucky, the conversation stuttering on around him until they finally give up and begin talking to each other in earnest, Will using the first opportunity to slip out and step away from the crowd, disappearing off through the room.

Alana watches him go, amused, but doesn't go after him, instead turning and letting herself get drawn back into conversation. Another easy hour passes like that, Alana sipping at her own cup of coffee as the night grows late. It's nearly one in the morning by the time the first of the guests begin to leave, sobered up enough to drive once more, Alana one of the last stragglers to depart, making up for the lost time by lingering a little longer.

She finds herself walking out beside Dr Amarin, pausing in the doorway to take her coat. A glance around shows no Hannibal to be seen, having disappeared somewhere after seeing off the last set of guests. Alana gives a smile to Dr Amarin, gesturing for him to wait, stepping over to peer into the kitchen - caterers taking care of the last of the dishes but no Hannibal. She gives it up for a bad job, and is about to turn back towards the door when something up the main stairs draws her eye and-

Oh. Alana's face warms a little. There, up in the shadow of the stairs, almost just hidden behind a set of samurai armour on display, Will has Hannibal pressed back against the wall. Their heads are ducked together, not quite kissing, but they might as well be, the space between them intimate, a smile on Will's lips as something Hannibal says makes him huff, closing the distance between them and leaning in and-

Alana looks away, not wanting to invade their privacy. She takes a careful step back, rounding the corner once more, and smiles at Dr Amarin, moving to shrug on her coat. "Ready to go? I'm happy to give you a ride back, if you need."

Dr Amarin nods, giving a graceful smile. "I would appreciate it. Ned and Gloria seem to have left without me."

"No problem," Alana replies. A companion for the drive back, one who'd been such interesting conversation too, is no trouble at all - especially not with the promise of some potential company at the end of the night, if she's reading this right.

A quiet sound from around the corner announces Hannibal's return, coming to see them off. He looks enterprise as ever, suit perfectly neat, the only evidence the lingering smile on his lips, the look of a man smitten. "I wish you both a safe drive back. We'll have to do this again sometime."

"It was good seeing you," Alana replies, warm, Hannibal giving a nod in return, and then he's holding the door open, Alana and Dr Amarin - Kasem, she should really call him - the last two to leave. The door closes, Hannibal on one side of it and Alana on the other, but perhaps that's alright in the end, Alana thinks, as Kasem meets her eyes and smiles, and Alana begins leading him towards her car. After all, the night seems to be turning into a fine one either way.

-

"Well that went well," Will says, only somewhat dryly, when the last of the caterers have finally taken their leave and Hannibal makes his way upstairs. All the cars in the drive have finally disappeared, the house quiet once more.

Hannibal joins Will by the window, where he's leaning against the sill, looking over the dark waters. He looks a joy in the dark suit he's wearing - not black this time but a deep inky blue, one that Will had permitted Hannibal to have made for him and which Hannibal had laid out on the bed that very afternoon. Hannibal's arm winds around Will's waist, back pressing warm to his back, chin settling on his shoulder.

"You were marvellous," Hannibal says, turning to press a soft kiss to the side of Will's neck. "Thank you, Will." It's a remarkable, watching Will walk among a crowd of humans, hypnotising in its own right. They part before him like fish before a shark, not even realising they're doing it. Will has spent time among humans before, but rarely like this. No doubt no few fishermen have spent hours in his company, not knowing who the stranger fishing beside them was, true, but Will abhors being the centre of attention, abhors even more the vapid empty smugness of the sort of people Hannibal surrounds himself with.

"Half of them are going to come away with horror stories about me," Will replies, voice low and amused, knowing. "You'll be the subject of gossip for months, no doubt."

Hannibal hums, low, his other hand coming to rest on Will's hip. "Let them talk," Hannibal says. "They don't come close to understanding the gift they've been given tonight, dining in your presence."

Will snorts, leaning back against Hannibal. He brings his class up, downing the last of it - whiskey this time, not champagne, poured from the private stock Hannibal keeps of the stuff just for him. "Perhaps next time you'll use your boon on something better."

"Ah, so you admit you will grant me another," Hannibal says teasingly, and Will shoots him an amused look.

"Depends whether your next gift is worth one," Will says, voice coming with just enough of an edge that Hannibal knows he's playing along now, teasing him in turn, refusing to let himself be impressed. So hard to please, Hannibal's lover is. Hannibal will simply have to try all the harder. He gives Hannibal a narrowed look, arched. "Who knows Hannibal, one of these days I might deny you."

Hannibal lets out an amused noise, low, turning to press another kiss to Will's neck, slow and warm, the first in a line trailing downwards. His hand slides down, fingers catching at the button of Will's suit jacket, threatening to slip beneath. "Then perhaps I ought to start now. There has to be some way to earn your favour."

"Who knows," Will replies, voice so dry and cutting, but he turns all the same, mouth meeting his. Hannibal's fingers curl softly through Will's hair, arm tightening around his waist and pulling Will in closer. When they part, they're breathless, Will's hands finding a place on Hannibal's chest as he presses him back, one step, then another. Imperious fingers tug open Hannibal's suit jacket, letting it fall to the floor, and then Hannibal is being pressed down, back on the bed as Will leans over him, grey eyes taking on the faintest hint of moon-glow as he leans down, kissing him.

Hannibal meets him, eager, hungry, drawing him closer. Will is magnificent in all forms, too beautiful to be borne, and Hannibal delights in any opportunity to witness him - to taste him, to feel his skin against his own, that sweet mouth stealing his in a kiss, dull human teeth giving way to sharper fangs as Will nips his bottom lip just hard enough to make Hannibal grunt, the faintest flush of copper bleeding through his mouth.

All the guests are gone, the house quiet, the only light in the room that which shines in through the windows from the half moon, and there is no one there to ear the noise Hannibal makes as Will pins him down and pops the buttons on his shift, the low, amused chuckle Will makes when Hannibal drags him closer and bites his lip in turn, hands sliding up Will's thighs to grip his ass, so fine in those tight suit pants.

"Will," Hannibal breathes, voice catching, low, " *Will,"* as Will's mouth finds his shoulder, mouthing a hot line there, Hannibal's shift cast open to lie on the sheets. Claws scrape against skin, Will's fingers black and glinting once more, stroking down Hannibal's belly, coming to settle on his hips.

A bite to Hannibal's neck, bruising, sharp enough to sting, and Hannibal is pulling Will closer, kissing him greedily. The suit jacket is thrown to the side, Will's shirt discarded and abandoned over the edge of the bed, his trousers kicked off, and Hannibal's hands slide down smooth, flawless skin. Hannibal loves Will in every form, but there's something to be said, he thinks for the ease of taking their pleasure in this one, with Will human, or near enough.

A hand strokes down, wicked, closing around Hannibal and stroking him, clawed fingertips dangerously sharp, dragging lightly against fragile, sensitive skin, Will's eyes meeting his, gleaming, as Hannibal only gets harder at the touch, letting out a broken noise and drawing Will closer, mouth meeting his in a brutal kiss. Will's hands are so cool, every part of him so cool, and yet his touch burns Hannibal's skin, Hannibal alight for it, aching for it. Another stroke, grip lightening, just skimming upwards, and Hannibal makes a noise, breaking their kiss breathlessly.

"Now you're just teasing me," he says, sending Will a knowing look, admonishing. Will's eyes narrow, something dark in his eyes, flashing amused and wicked, grip tightening around Hannibal's cock almost brutally, making him hiss, Will leaning in close to his ear.

"Maybe I like seeing you desperate," Will replies, a purr against Hannibal's skin, only partly mocking. Or rather, as mocking as it is fond. Will is too much a fan of these games, and Hannibal too, for them to ever abandon it. "Maybe you do deserve a reward. Or maybe I should just make you *beg."*

A bite against Hannibal's shoulder, sharp, making him gasp, Will's hands stroking up Hannibal's hips only to take a firm grip, claws dragging downwards. Another bite, Will sucking a bruise against Hannibal's shoulder, and Hannibal arches into it, a hand fisting in Will's hair, the other resting on his shoulder, dragging his mouth to hiss so that he can kiss him deep.Will's claws dig in, squeezing Hannibal's ass, taking a handful, and then he's pulling Hannibal's legs open, settling beneath them, coming down to press a thumb against his entrance.

Will pauses as he finds it already slick, waiting ready, drawing back from the kiss so that he can nip the lobe of Hannibal's ear. "Presumptive."

"Prepared," Hannibal replies, voice low and satisfied, amused. "I thought you might like some sort of recompense, for all the tedious hours spent at dinner."

A nip against his throat, Will's teeth razor sharp now. "So bold, even now," he says, even as he sinks a finger in, Hannibal letting out a low breath at the feeling of the clawed finger pressing in. Will would never hurt him, not like that, but the threat always remains, Hannibal's skin all too thin when he feels the weight of Will's claws against him, when he knows just how easy it is for them to cut. It makes him moan, voice ragged, cock only standing harder, sitting flushed and heavy against his belly now, filling out properly.

"Darling," Hannibal murmurs, voice catching on a minute gasp as Will sinks a second claw in, slick, forceful. Hannibal turns, pressing a breathy kiss against Will's throat. *"Will-"*

"Beg," Will says, fingers driving in, crooking inside Hannibal and making him groan, fingers tightening on Will's shoulders. Everything inside Hannibal is too tight, too sensitive, and he

feels Will's fingers like they're dragging down his very spine, touching every place inside him.

He knows where this is going, they both do, Will enjoys using him too much and Hannibal being used, but Will will make him work for it, as he always does.

"Darling," Hannibal tries again, entreating, only for his voice to catch on Will's next curling thrust, the bite Will lay's against his shoulder, just teasing with sharp teeth. "My dear-"

"Beg," Will says again, murmuring it against his throat, so soft, so kind, taunting it out of him as he curls his fingers in deep and drags them against the spot that makes Hannibal shudder, that makes him let out a low grunt, clenching tightly around him.

"So cruel to me," Hannibal replies, amused, voice rough, and Will smiles against his throat, rocking his claws in deep again. Will presses a kiss against Hannibal's neck, soft.

"You like it," Will says, and drags his fingers there again, harder this time, just to feel Hannibal arch below it. Another night, Hannibal might draw this out more, might make a play for being the one in control, but not tonight. After all evening entertaining Hannibal's guests Will has more than earned whatever he likes, and Hannibal is keen to offer. If Will wants him to beg, then Hannibal will give him that. He'll give him anything.

"Will," Hannibal says. "Will, *please-"*

A snarl, Will's mouth meeting Hannibal's in a brutal kiss. Two fingers become three, rocking in, Hannibal groaning and arching into it, hands catching on Will's shoulders, his back. Will steals the breath from his lungs, the kiss all teeth, all hunger, too dark and ravenous, and then his fingers are drawing back, hands coming to settle on Hannibal's thighs, spreading his legs wider as Will presses forward and-

Hannibal groans against Will's throat, hands tightening on his shoulders as Will presses into him. Hannibal had been liberal earlier, when preparing himself, but the hours in between have left him tight. The pressure of Will sinking in is brutal, so slick, so hot, and Hannibal's breath catches a little, a grunt forced out of him. Will doesn't have mercy, pressing in and bearing in in a single smooth thrust, slow and deep, until he's settled into the hilt and Hannibal is gasping against his neck.

"Will," Hannibal's voice is breathless, adoring, and Will turns his head, mouth finding his, devolving into a messy, sloppy kiss as he tightens his claws on Hannibal's thighs and draws out, rocking sharply back in. It's all noise after that - Hannibal's hitched gasps and groans echoing off the ways, the slick noise of Will pressing deeper, skin slapping against skin. "Will, *Will-"*

A hiss against his throat, the noise guttural, inhuman, reverberating low through Hannibal's bones, biting a kiss there, making Hannibal arch, one hand settling tight on the back of Will's neck, feeling the skin ripple there beneath his touch. Spines melt down Wills spine, glistening back as they emerge and then disappear again, and Hannibal fists a hand in Will's hear and drags him closer, kissing him breathlessly as claws hands settle on his hips, digging his sharp.

A moan, Hannibal's hands dragging down Will's back, and the mouth biting kisses down his shoulder is full of too many fangs now. A gasp, as Will rocks his hips sharply, the shadow on the wall now a thing with spines, Will's eyes too bright, glowing with moonlight. A chuckle against his throat, claws dragging down Hannibal's flanks, and hand dropping to fist him sharply, and its not smooth skin between his legs but scales, sliding cool and smooth against Hannibal's inner thighs as Will rocks deeper, so much thicker now, curving more sharply, the shape different, making Hannibal groan.

A thick black tail coils across the bed, spilling over its sides, trailing fins glistening wet in the open air, spines melting up his sides. He winds around Hannibal, spinning him there in the nest of his coils, sharp teeth nipping at the skin of Hannibal's shoulder, turning his mouth to meet his when Hannibal pulls him up, kissing him hungrily, tasting his own blood on his lips.

Hannibal groans, gasping as Will picks up his sharp rocking, Hannibal's fingers raking lines down his back, leaving marks on the pale skin there only because Will allows him to as Will pins him down and takes him, covering his shoulder in marks, biting hard enough to hurt, hard enough to make Hannibal gasp, just to feel the way it makes Hannibal's cock twitch and begin to leak. "Will, *fuck-"*

"I wonder what they would think if they could see you now," Will asks, biting a kiss against Hannibal's throat, hungry and possessive, claws finding Hannibal's thighs as he fucks him hard, fully monstrous now, Hannibal groaning beneath him, punished out little noises leaving him. Will's mouth finds his, kissing him deep, all tongue, Hannibal letting out a breathless noise as he pulls him closer. "Would they still think you refined? Would they fall to their knees in fear, claw out their own eyes? Would they watch in envy?"

Hannibal is a mess below him, shoulders red with bite marks, scratching threatening to bead with blood across his hips, his thighs, where Will's claws have traced lines. Even here, half out of his and full to bursting with Will's cock, he's still too refined a thing, too pretty, too elegant. It makes Will want to ruin him.

Will bites a kiss against Hannibal's throat, fucking forward sharply, the bed groaning now, creaking, soft silk-thin fins trailing softly against Hannibal's skin as Will pulls him deeper into his coils. Hannibal's hands claws against his back, grasping, pulling him closer, those lethal, strong, dangerous hands turned to a different purpose now, Hannibal arching into his touch.

"Will- Will *please-"*

A sharp bite, Hannibal letting out a low gasp, cock throbbing, so close now, and Will grinds in even deeper, as far as he can go and then a little bit more. Hannibal turns his face against Will's throat, one hand tightening in his hair, and Will skims his claws down his belly, over strong, soft tissue and down through curling hair. Hannibal's fever hot in his hand, a soft health of satin over molten iron, and Will's hand tightens around him cruelly, stroking once, twice-

Hannibal shudders, groaning low against Will's throat as he clenches around him, spending in shot spurts across his belly, and Will surges up, kissing him, beginning to move properly now,

sharp hot quick thrusts, Hannibal clutching at Will's back and groaning into his mouth. Will's claws draw red lines across Hannibal's hips, and he nips at his throat, letting out a low rumble, finds flaring outwards, half translucent in the open air, moonlight shining through them and shadowing the bed.

"Fuck," Will breathes, voice a low rumble, rocking forward with choppy thrusts. "Fuck, *Hannibal."*

A hand curls around the back of Will's neck, guiding him forward, head resting against Hannibal's throat as Will groans, thrusting roughly. Hannibal's voice is a warm murmur in his ear, voice smooth as honey, fingers squeezing the back of Will's neck. "Inside me, Will. Whatever you like."

Will lets out a sharp noise, fins flaring outwards, claws cutting in deep, blood running slick against skin as he buried his face against Hannibal's throat and gasps, grinding in one last time in coming. Spines spill outwards, slick and bristling, fins mantling over the bed, covering them both, hiding Hannibal beneath him as he moans against his throat, Hannibal stroking a hand down Will's back as Will pours into him, spilling in hot pulses. At the end of it, Will's melted against him, a low quiet purring sound rumbling through the room, reverberating through Hannibal's bones as Hannibal strokes his fingers through Will's hair. Hannibal turns, pressing a soft kiss to Will's mouth, Will turning to meet it, Will's claws tightening one last time on Hannibal's hips as he grunts and pulls out, white leaking wet down Hannibal's thighs.

Will flops down on top of him, spent now and left lazy with it, tucking his face against Hannibal's side. The deep cuts on Hannibal's hips are already starting to heal, reducing to a sharp sting, the wounds there and present but not little more than scratches - deep enough that Hannibal will feel them with every movement, shallow enough to not require further medical attention, exactly as Hannibal prefers them.

It's lazy for a while after that, Hannibal stroking Will's hair, the smooth skin of his back, Will purring, claws kneading minutely at Hannibal's skin, enjoying the press of his skin against his own, still sprawled in the nest of Will's coils.

A shift, cool scales sliding against skin, a fin manifesting for a moment as it tickles Hannibal's leg, and Will turns, pressing a soft kiss to Hannibal's neck, to the old scar there, now turned silvered with age, where Will's claws had once bitten in deep. Hannibal's eyes close, leaning into the touch, and he cups Will's jaw, guiding his mouth up to meet his, kissing him slow and sweet.

Hannibal smiles as Will draws back. He's an eerie mix of inhuman and human like this - beautiful face and stubble, glowing moon eyes and too sharp teeth, just like the rest of him. Humane and monstrous, somehow both crueller and kinder than either. Hannibal cannot think of a world where he does not know him, does not love him, the concept too alien and bleak.

"Not too tedious a night then," Hannibal says finally, voice quiet and abused, thumb stroking alone the line of Will's cheek. Will's lashes flutter, his eyes closing, half lidded, leaning into the touch, turning his face into Hannibal's hand. He lets out an amused breath.

"The end maybe," Will replies. "Not the rest of it."

Hannibal just makes a noise, undeterred. His fingers trace a slow circle on the small of Will's back, tracing the line where smooth skin meets sleek scales. "Maybe next time I'll invite Jack Crawford," Hannibal says, an amused glint to his eyes. Alana had begun working with the Behavioral Science Unit nearly a year ago, and while Hannibal's restrained himself, he can't help but admit his curiosity. There's a certain charm to the thought of it, sitting across at dinner from the man investigating his case - the *Ripper's* case - watching him eat the spoils of Hannibal's table, not knowing he's becoming implicit in the very crime he seeks to avenge.

Will lets out a huff, turning to bite a kiss against Hannibal's shoulder, only half reprimanding. "One of these days someone's going to pick up on the reason you're so cocky."

Hannibal hums, low, a smile on his lips, turning to press a kiss to Will's cheek. "Maybe," he agrees. "But not yet."

"But not yet," Will agrees, amused, sending him a knowing look. Sooner or later Hannibal will be discovered, and perhaps even caught, but it won't matter in the end. He knows who he belongs to, and he'll find his way back to Will in the end - that or be taken back, Will too greedy to share for long.

Let Jack Crawford look. He won't enjoy what he finds, even if he does find it.

"Smug," Will says drily, pressing a kiss to Hannibal's chess. His claws stroke up Hannibal's sides, over his ribs, coming to rest on his hips. "One day, Hannibal, you're going to become too insufferable."

"But not yet," Hannibal says, amused, eyes dark and fond as Will presses another kiss to his chest, slow, lower, and then another. He gets a wicked smile in return, Will's eyes gleaming, glinting with inhuman light, and then Hannibal is letting out a soft noise, fingers coming to curl gently in Will's hair as Will slides lower, pressing his legs apart as he slips between them.

It's all quiet after that, Hannibal's soft gasping breaths the only thing echoing in the dark.

End Notes

oh god please do not @ me about US geography, art history, wine, Hannibal's cooking, or any other minute detail i might have gotten wrong. google can only do so much and i am not smart enough for this fandom

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!